

Decree & Destiny

Free Will or Determinism



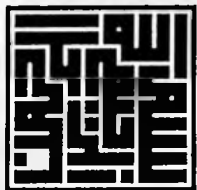
Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Revised Edition

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iii
Foreword.....	ix
Preface.....	xiii
Introduction.....	xiv
Historical Background.....	xvi
1. Decree and Destiny in the Qur'an	1
<i>Qadar</i> (decree) and <i>Qada'</i> (destiny) in Language.....	1
A Definition of Decree and Destiny.....	1
God, the Originator of All.....	3
Man's True Impotence	4
The Inevitability of Death.....	4
The Knowledge of the Outcome of Destiny	5
The Ultimate Dependence	5
All Creation's Dependence upon the Creator	6
The Ultimate Record.....	6
Man's Freedom within God's Order	7
Measure and Bounds.....	7
Fixed and Changeable Decrees.....	8
Man's Unification with the Decree	9
The Qur'an, the Overall Knowledge	10
Reality Guides to Itself, by Itself.....	11
Heedlessness	11
Prevaricators and the Role of the Prophets.....	12

The Ways of Reality	13
The Gift of Discrimination	13
Why Diversity and Duality	13
Why Some People Cause Themselves Injustice	14
The Disconnected Ones	14
Modes of Destiny.....	15
Summary.....	17
2. Prophetic Traditions and Teachings.....	19
Introduction.....	19
Creation and the Command of God	19
The Origin of Good and Evil.....	20
Compulsion and Delegation	21
Will and Power	30
The Extent of the Capability of the Bondsman	32
Freedom, Action and Outcome	33
God's Covenant with Man	35
Knowledge of the Decree	36
The Nature of Action	40
Contentment with the Decree	43
Man's <i>Rizq</i> (Provision).....	46
The Finality of God's Decree	49
The Purpose of Creation	52
Decree and Destiny, the Secret of God.....	55
3. Affliction, the Ultimate Remedy	57
4. Selected Topics Related to Decree and Destiny.....	65
Introduction.....	65

Determinism	65
Certainty and Change	67
Cause and Effect	70
Choice within Bounds.....	71
<i>The More the Knowledge, the Less the Appropriate Choice</i>	71
<i>Freedom within the Decree</i>	72
<i>The Importance of Gratitude</i>	73
<i>Man's Interaction with the Decree</i>	73
<i>Knowledge of the Limits</i>	74
Man's Choice	75
<i>Disappointment or Punishment, an Indicator of Wrong or</i> <i>Inappropriate Action</i>	76
<i>The Freedom of No Choice</i>	77
Collective Destiny	77
Revealed and Acquired Knowledge.....	79
The Law of Opposites.....	82
Justice	83
Reward and Punishment	85
Every Rule has an Exception.....	87
Miracles	88
Kismet (<i>Qismah</i>) – Luck, Fortune.....	89
Supplication and Prayer	90
Causality and Repentance.....	91
The Search for Happiness.....	93
Why People Differ	95
Selective Search.....	97
Fate or Freedom	98
The Creator and Created	98
A Better Destiny	99
The Free Man.....	101

Conclusion	105
Glossary	107
Bibliography	110

Foreword

Nearly every chapter in the long history of Islamic thought is concerned in one way or another with the question of *al-qada' wa'l-qadar*, decree and destiny, or seen in somewhat of a different perspective, free will and determinism. The earliest Islamic community, with its intellectual centres in Basra and Kufa, was concerned with three basic theological problems: what is the nature of the Qur'an, who is saved, and how is man's free will and moral responsibility based upon choice related to God's omnipotence and also omniscience? Out of these basically Islamic questions related to the teachings of the Qur'an and *hadith*, there grew the earliest schools of theology, or *Kalam*. The Sufis and philosophers were also concerned from the earliest times with such questions, especially that of decree and destiny, as seen in the utterances of one of the first patriarchs of Sufism, Hasan al-Basri, and the writings of the first Muslim philosophers, such as al-Kindi.

The Qur'an speaks explicitly of both the absolute power and knowledge of God concerning everything in His creation and man's responsibility for his actions, hence his freedom to choose. The *hadith*, which is the supreme commentary upon the Sacred Text, elucidates these teachings by providing additional knowledge concerning a problem which is insoluble upon the plane of rationalistic analysis and without consideration of that inner dimension of the revelation which provides for man's knowledge of the higher levels of existence and of the relativity of man's existence and will vis-à-vis God, Who alone is ultimately real.

On the basis of the revealed sources of Islam, numerous responses were to be provided by various schools of thought concerning decree and destiny, free will and determinism. Nearly every Sunni, as well as Shi'ite, theologian has been concerned with it and, in fact, the main schools of Sunni *Kalam* - the Ash'ariyyah, Mu'tazilah and Maturidiyyah - have been distinguished from each other mostly on the basis of their attitude towards this question. Likewise, nearly every Islamic philosopher has written on the subject and the separate treatises on decree and destiny by Ibn Sina and Sadr al-Din Shirazi, who came six centuries after him, are well known to students of Islamic thought. As for the Sufis, from the early discourses of Hasan al-Basri and Junayd to the elaborate treatises of 'Abd al-Wahhab

al-Sha'rani and 'Abd al-Rahman Jami nearly a millennium later, concern with the question of decree and destiny has remained central. Likewise, one finds this theme pervading the Mathnawi of Jalal al-Din Rumi, who has provided some of the most profound answers to this central question of human existence.

In Shi'ism the sayings of the Imams, as well as the thought inspired by them, provided a rich treasury of wisdom dealing with this theme, a treasury which is much less known to the West than the other sources and modes of Islamic thought. Many sayings of the Imams, especially 'Ali ibn Abi Talib's, are concerned with this subject and provide a solution for it at the highest level of metaphysical understanding.

Usually this problem is approached by conceiving of both God and man as 'absolute' realities with 'absolute' wills. Then the question is asked as to how it is possible for God to be omnipotent and omniscient and yet for man to have free will and act according to this freedom. As long as the question is posed in such a way, there is no solution for the dichotomy that it presents to the human mind, and one is faced with the choice of either accepting God's omnipotence and denying human free will or accepting man's free will and denying God's omnipotence, solutions which stand opposed to the very text of the Qur'an as well as the intention of its teachings.

From the point of view of Islamic wisdom or gnosis (*al-hikmah* and *al-ma'rifah*), which is none other than pure metaphysics as expounded through the revealed forms of Islam on the basis of the inner dimensions of the Islamic revelation, only God is absolute while man is relative. Moreover, according to the *hadith*, *khalāqa 'Llahu Adama 'ala suratihi* (God has created man upon His 'form'), man reflects God's Names and Qualities which constitute the *surah* referred to in this *hadith*. Now, it must be remembered that God is both pure necessity and pure freedom; therefore, something of both qualities have to be reflected in man. Man is determined by God through all the conditions of existention which make him be what he is, but he is also free to 'unbecome' what he is through ascending the grades and scales of existence towards the one who alone is pure freedom. Man's will, moreover, is free in the ultimate sense only in conforming itself to the Will of God. We are free to the degree that we *are*, to the degree that we approach the One who alone *is* in the

absolute sense. Man is what he becomes and becomes what he is because his actions affect his existence while his existence determines the modes of his actions. He is determined because God is pure necessity and the source of all existence; he is free because he is the mirror in which are reflected the Divine Qualities and Attributes including freedom which is concomitant of His absoluteness. Human existence is that great mystery woven of the warp of necessity and the woof of freedom. That is why man alone is the microcosm, the key to universal existence and the only being who while himself, can go beyond himself, who is bound yet free, who realizes real freedom through surrendering his will to God and who realizes pure necessity by making use of his God-given freedom to become what he is in the Divine Presence.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's book has the great advantage that it presents to the Western reader the deepest aspects of the problems of decree and destiny through the actual words of the Qur'an, the Prophet and the Shi'ite Imams. Many of the sayings translated in this work, especially those of the Imams, have not been available in such a manner before in their direct relation to the intricacies of the question of *qada'* and *qadar*. His work does not attempt to be a complete theological or philosophical treatment of the subject. Rather, he draws from the traditional sources numerous sayings, complemented by his own commentaries, to present to the reader the remarkable richness of Islamic thought on this issue and to remove some of the well-known errors concerning Islam such as Islam being fatalistic and having no room for human initiative and dynamism, as if early Islam did not spread from China to France in a century or it did not create one of the greatest civilizations in human history.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri must be congratulated on making the deepest sources of Islamic thought concerning the question of decree and destiny available to the Western and also modern Muslim reader who often relies upon works in English or French even concerning Islamic subjects. May this work help dispel that cloud of ignorance which surrounds this central issue of human existence. May those destined to profit from the sources of Islamic thought presented in this work, be decreed to benefit fully from it through the freedom of the use of their intelligence which God has bestowed upon all human beings as His supreme gift.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr; Washington, D.C.; Shawwal 1407 (A.H.); June 1987 (A.D.)

Preface

This book is a review and an update of a work first published in 1991. Its principal objective is to establish a bridge between Islam and other cultures and religions. Islam's Prophetic revelations, practices and knowledge are not the preserve of any nation or culture; they are a divine gift to all creation.

This book will be most useful when used as an integrated package, informative as well as transformative. The quotations from the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions and teachings are translated and explained for the modern reader. It would not be possible, without these traditions, to grasp the complexity of decree and destiny or free will and predestination.

As this is a multi-dimensional topic, some repetitions occur in the text. This brings about a proper merging of various interrelated issues. The recurrence of similar themes is like the emergence of a pattern in a mosaic or a tapestry, where the use of same tile pattern or colour of thread complements another pattern in order to complete the total design. As the concepts that we have tried to cover in this book deal with varying aspects of existence and Reality identical topics will appear in different dimensions.

Truth and Reality appears as countless realities and events, and each one integrates and interlinks with others. Thus, the knowledge of Reality cannot be disseminated by controlled scientific methods. We need to link different facets for the entire model to take shape. The start is rational and logical and ends with insight and subtle openings in higher consciousness. The pursuit of spiritual wisdom is like climbing a rocky mountain. The seeker on his journey will traverse many valleys and ravines, which are often shrouded in darkness. It takes patience, persistence and Divine grace to perceive and experience the whole picture regarding the nature of free will and God's laws and decrees.

Introduction

The issue of the extent to which man has free will has been the frequent topic of philosophical and religious debate from the early civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece right through to our own times. Western philosophers, such as Spinoza, Descartes, Leibnitz, Kant and others, have added their interpretations to the theories of the ancients. The question of free will and predestination is a most important topic in the study of Islamic thought, for it cannot be understood by pure philosophical or analytical debate. It deals with two spheres of consciousness, one is earthly and causal, the other is to do with the Absolute and sacred patterns. This is one major reason for the difficulty in understanding the fundamentals of this issue.

A large body of verses from the Qur'an and many traditions in the Islamic heritage deal with the relationship between the will of God and man's will, and the relationship between God's power and His overall governance over the universe.

We all face situations in life, where there are several choices and possibilities. At most times we are helpless in influencing the outcome of the situation. Often we have limited choices and the outcome can be very different from what was expected. Our freedom of choice is exceptionally limited by physical and mental needs and pre-conditioning. The unconscious part of our mental processes also plays a crucial part in our decisions.

The natural world is governed by limitations, boundaries, patterns and cycles. Most of these laws have exceptions and mutations. A similar map applies to freedom of choice. Absolute freedom belongs to the mysterious zone of God alone. Human freedom lies within conditioned and limited consciousness, often driven by the urge to survive and thrive. This freedom is limited to circumstances and can only determine limited outcome.

In Islam's early history two different schools of thought emerged. One, the Jabariyyah (from *jabr*, to enforce), believed in an unknown and absolute decree, which we cannot in any way overcome or interfere with; the other, the Qadariyyah, say that human beings have freedom of choice to decide their own destiny. The Jabariyyah maintain that God is the real cause of the actions of all of creation. The implication is that it is God, Who causes wrong or good and then punishes or rewards. Therefore, all actions belong

to God but are metaphorically attributed to people because human beings are the locus of God's activity. This idea overlooks the existence of causes and effects between things, at a natural, basic level.

The Qadariyyah hold the view that all human actions are free and are not predetermined by the will of God, Who has given full power to His creatures for their actions. As the power is fore-ordained, the decree of God has no part to play in it, and that attribution of man's actions to God necessitates the attributing of imperfection to Him. All existing things have specific causes, and the chain of causes and effects can be traced back to the First Cause, Which is God. This school of thought has separated God from His power, unless we distinguish between Supreme Power (God's) and limited and conditioned power as it manifests in creation.

This book is based on the Qur'an and the Prophetic teachings, which demonstrate that the human position lies between those two extreme beliefs. There is some freedom but this is limited to the boundaries and restrictions defined by space and time. Human life on earth is work in progress. It starts with basic sentiency and leads to awakening to the One Source and destiny of the whole universe.

From a basic personal view our actions are truly our own actions and thus, we are the cause of our own actions, which are under our control and are subject to our free choice. However, from a higher point of view, our actions follow patterns and directions beyond us and are primal designs. God does not compel us in our actions; hence He does not wrong us by punishing us for our errors, as we have the power of choice in what we do. Yet, God has not delegated to us the power to 'create' our actions, for the overall control remains with Him. Creation, Judgment and Command all belong to the divine Reality, Who has power over all things.

Ultimately it is human mind, intention and action that can resolve this issue by following the Prophetic map that shows our limited freedom relates to a short span of space and time. I may be free to lift this cup from the table and drink from it. The ultimate outcome of the liquid's effect on me is not in my hands. Intention, attention and action do not always result in the anticipated outcome. What is most desired is sustainable goodness to enable human beings to be in balance in body, mind and heart. Happiness is the outcome of a situation with least misery, anxiety or insecurity. The hierarchy is from the material to the spiritual.

Historical Background

During the early days of Islam, the light of the Prophet Muhammad's (Allah's salutations and peace be upon him and his family)¹, presence was such that an understanding of the laws of existence and man's freedom within these bounds was transmitted and understood by the people. However, with the confusions and difficulties that followed his death there was, in a sense, a break in that light, and the question of free will and predestination became a much debated issue.

The Umayyad dynasty used theological arguments to justify their rule, declaring that God predetermines all happenings and acts. Their possession of the Caliphate was therefore by God's will, and the people were consequently obliged to submit to their rule. Their political opponents took the opposing stance that while good actions are from God, base actions are from man, so no blame can be attributed to God as He has delegated freedom of action to man.

The name 'Qadarite' was commonly used to describe those who denied the *qadar* or predetermination of God, and were thus believers in human free will. At a later date, it was also used in a negative way to describe those of a fatalistic persuasion. The founder of this school of thought is generally considered to be Ma'bad al-Juhani. He denied that the wrong acts of the Umayyads were determined by God. He joined the rising of Ibn al-Ash'ath in 701 AD, for which he was subsequently executed. Another noted exponent of the Qadarite school was Ghaylan ad-Dimashqi, a Copt, who also rebelled against the Umayyads and was executed. It is claimed that the Caliph Yazid III al-Naqis, who reigned for six months in 744 AD, was a follower of Ghaylan. The Caliph certainly stated that the Umayyads had committed wrong actions and pledged himself to correct them, and to rule according to the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (way, habitual custom, line of conduct; used in reference to God or the Prophet).

The Jabariyyah concept of predestination was indigenous to the areas where Islam first arose, where people tended to hold fatalistic beliefs. The pre-Islamic poetry of Arabia is full of references to the control of human

¹ *Salla Allahu 'alayhi wa-alihi wa-sallam: Allah's salutations and peace be upon him and his family. This invocation is implied every time the Prophet's name is mentioned.*

life by 'time', which was seen as an abstract, impersonal force. This concept acted as a psychological necessity for the nomad, releasing him from undue anxiety about events he was unable to control, and adapting him to acceptance of extreme irregularities of even natural phenomena, such as rain. The Arabian nomad believed that it was the outcome of man's acts that were fixed, not the particular acts themselves. They believed that the day of his death was fixed, as was his *rizq* (provision), which was a comforting thought in a land where hunger was prevalent.

The Qur'an revealed man's life to be controlled by a merciful God, rather than the impersonal and unfeeling Time. The doctrine of a final Day of Judgment confirmed the eternal destiny of man, which was to be determined by the quality of his actions.

The people's acquiescence in the abuses of the Umayyad rule can thus be understood as the natural continuation of the pre-Islamic Arab outlook. The Umayyad argument, that as they were the Caliphs or Deputies of God everything they did was decreed by God including their evil actions, was in harmony with the fatalistic heritage of many of the people they ruled. Nonetheless, it would be over-simplistic to conclude that theological argument was the prime contributor to the survival of the dynasty, power and coercion being equally significant factors.

The Qadariyyah stance that good acts emanate from God, the bad from man, was similar to the principles of Christianity and like Christianity showed clear traces of Hellenistic rationalism. Many proponents of this belief may have been recent converts from Christianity, and may also have come from urban rather than from nomadic backgrounds.

It is clear that a diverse range of views were held by people under the umbrella of Qadariyyah. The more extreme held that total power had been delegated to man, hence he was able to act without God's help and guidance, but others will have had more moderate beliefs. The great Sufi Master, Hasan al-Basri, who was considered to have Qadarite sympathies, for example, rejected a fully deterministic outlook, and preached that a belief in predestination should not be used as an excuse for inactivity. He emphasized individual responsibility in the moral sphere, but balanced this by insistence on God's mercy, and His ultimate control of man's destiny.

These varying interpretations of the extent of man's free will were later

refined by the philosophers of the Mu'tazilite school, who were to develop the doctrines of the Qadariyyah. Their founder, Wasil ibn 'Ata' (80-131 AH/699-749 AD), was originally a member of the circle of Hasan al-Basri. By the ninth century AD the Qadariyyah school had been largely replaced by the Mu'tazilite. The latter were engaged in endless debate with the Ash'arites, so named after their founder Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d 330 AH/942 AD), in an attempt to find a balance between the omnipotence of God and the need for personal moral effort.

The Ash'arites, could be regarded to some extent as being the successors of the Jabariyyah; Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari himself was originally a pupil of the Mu'tazilite Master, al-Jubba'i. He broke from his teacher in maintaining that Divine Justice could not be defined in human terms, and was in agreement with the orthodox stance as expounded by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.241 AH/855 AD) by which all acts, be they good or evil, take place by the will of God; as compared to the Mu'tazilite theories, which appear to restrict the power of God.

One of al-Ash'ari's contemporaries was Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d 333 AH/945 AD) of Samarqand. Maturidism, which is similar to Ash'arism in basic outlook, differs in saying that although all acts are willed by God, evil acts do not occur with 'the good pleasure of God'. This theory emphasizes the omnipotence of God but allows for some human participation in the process.

The more extreme among the Jabariyyah were sometimes referred to as Jahmiyyah, from the name of Jahm ibn Safwan, who was purported to have upheld the theory of pure determinism. In actuality this was more a term of abuse used by members of the opposing schools to link the Jabariyyah with a known historical character of the period, who was regarded as a renegade. He had fought with a non-Muslim Turkish Sultan against his fellow Muslims. There was never any serious group who was followers of this man or preached his teachings.

As many of the Qadariyyah were motivated by their political opposition to the Umayyads, the rise to power of the Abbasids altered the relationship of this doctrine to the political situation of the day. It was no longer seen as a sign of opposition to the government. Indeed, the Caliph al-Ma'mun and his successors gave official backing to certain Mu'tazilite doctrines. However, after the Caliph Mutawakkil the question of '*jabr*' once more rose to prominence. This was partly caused by a reaction against the excesses of the extreme Mu'tazilites, who were branded as heretics by

the orthodox Muslims, but it was also brought about by the appeal this belief has for man, when his state seems helpless. Indeed as a philosophy it possessed a great deal of political advantage, because it persuaded people to submit even to the rule of despots. Thus a belief in decree and destiny in its goodness and its badness was frequently twisted to cow people into an acceptance of unjust government.

The advocates of determinism often used the example that man is like a leaf in the wind of destiny, and that God creates in man his actions and all his doings in the same way that He does in stones and other forms of His creation. So man does not have the power to change or do anything. They used selected *ayat* (verses) of the Qur'an and traditions to justify this hypothesis; indeed if one looks at many of these in a simplistic fashion, the theory holds.

Generally speaking the majority of the Sunni Muslims veered towards the Ash'ariyyah school of thought; while the Shi'as and some Sunnis argued for a more intermediate position, which allowed for the existence of a certain measure of freedom in specific areas, while in other aspects man has no choice. So these divisions are in a sense simplistic, and historians, who like to compartmentalize, have often tended to show the extremes of the argument, while the majority of the believing Muslim population will have fallen between the two positions, without necessarily having total clarity of understanding of the extent of man's freedom of action or the bounds to which he is subjected.

The widespread influence of the Ash'ariyyah can be seen in all Arabic, Persian and Far Eastern literature and poetry. Their influence is even reflected in the culture of the Ja'fari Shi'as. It is largely due to this that many European philosophers and men of literature, casting a cursory glance at the broad spectrum of Muslim attitudes on predestination, have labelled them as fatalistic. Indeed one of the major criticisms and miscomprehensions of Islam by non-Muslims and also by some so-called Muslims is focused on the question of decree and destiny. The accusation is that one of the main causes for the backwardness of some Muslim communities is their belief in predestination. If belief in the knowledge of decree and destiny is a cause of lethargy and inactivity and contributes to the subsequent decadence and collapse of the culture, how, then, can we explain the great Islamic effulgence of the past fourteen hundred years?

Decree and Destiny in the Qur'an

Qadar (decree) and *Qada'* (destiny) in Language

In language *qadar* (measure, decree) represents both the delineation and execution of the process by which a final end, signified by *qada'* (destiny) is arrived at. The connotation of processing attached to *qadar* contains within it the possibility of change; whereas, when a destiny (*qada'*) has come about a point of irreversibility has been reached.

The divine meaning of *qadar* signifies 'creational decree', while the worldly meaning implies 'judgment by word or action'. There is a clear differentiation between Divine *qudrah* (ability, power) and human *qudrah*, for human ability differs according to the magnitude of the task, the effort and power it needs to be executed, and is subject to time, whereas for the absolute Creator all actions are possible and effortless at all times.

The following are some of the dictionary definitions of *qadar* and *qada'*:

Qadar: 'extent, scope, quantity, scale, rate, measure, number, sum, amount, degree, grade, worth, value, standing, rank, divine decree'. *Qadar* can also imply 'clarifying, distinguishing, ordering, ordaining'.

Qada': 'severing, ending, closing, determination, conclusion, winding up, completion, accomplishment, carrying out, execution, performance, fulfilment, satisfaction, payment, passing, Divine Decree, destiny, fate, judgment'.

A Definition of Decree and Destiny

Decrees are the rules which define life's experiences on earth. Most of these rules are describable or measurable, especially those dealing with the visible realities. The rules that govern all aspects of physical (visible and experiential) existence combine with those that control the unseen forces to form a network that will result in, for example, the laws of physics. We can describe the phenomenon of light, for instance, as both a waveband and a particle called a photon. The rules somehow emerge from an unknown domain into describable, measurable, physical laws. So the decrees can be

seen as a series of multitudinous models by means of which the creation, seen and unseen, is held together.

Destiny is the final occurrence that is experienced by the individual through the passage of time, when these laws are enacted. It is when a describable event has already passed through time.

The concept of destiny is also parallel in Arabic to another term '*ajal*', which signifies 'appointed time, date, deadline, instant of death, respite, delay'. If we say a business partnership has an '*ajal*' of five years, it means that at the end of this period it will have reached its full destiny, which is dissolution.

The final destiny of every man is his awakening to his permanent non-time reality, from which he has emerged. We are given the experience of this life, with all its decrees, for us to know them, accept them and become one with them so that we can see our destiny within them, and our destiny beyond them, when time stops at the point of death.

Through the discipline of meditative practices, time can be experienced as coming to a stop. Whilst we fear death we love and are dependent on deep sleep, which is the nearest experience to death. If we are able to experience the mini-death of inner contemplation, we stand a good chance of realizing that our true reality, the Source of the cause behind existence, is eternal and ever present. It is only the body that dies, while the soul or spirit continues into perpetuity.

As we are all programmed to dislike fear, the universal fear of death betrays the true meaning of death. It is only an experiential barrier that demarcates a natural discrimination by returning the body to where it belongs, and by returning the soul to whence it originally emanated from in the zone of eternal consciousness. So the fact that we do not like death reveals a certain measure of its falsehood as a termination of life. It is in fact a process of segregation. The confusion is due to identifying with the body and mind rather than the soul within. It is only the body that dies; for it has been the vehicle for the development of the self, whose proper schooling lies in the melting pot of the world of duality, whilst yearning for the knowledge of the One from whom it emanated in the first place.

The human destiny is potentially the highest of known creations - as was our beginning. We start life with a basic level of existence and are driven to reach the highest levels of consciousness and experiences.

Enlightenment is to know the perfection and reliability of God's plan; with reflection and wisdom we realize that human will is a very small

factor in contentment and sustained happiness. Spiritual wisdom leads to witnessing the utter perfection of the instant and abandonment to the moment. Then we come to understand the truth that abundance is available at all times to everyone. This is the final awakening to the state of Oneness. We are brought into time in order that we may face the incredible, unfathomable, never-ending non-time. So we are already predestined to face eternity. This is the intended perfect destiny and anything else is incomplete.

The following verses of the Qur'an explain different aspects of free will and determinism.

God, the Originator of All

...they entertained about Allah thoughts of ignorance quite unjustly, saying: We have no hand in the affair. Say: Surely the affair is wholly (in the hands) of Allah...

(3:154)

The Qur'an confirms that all creational possibilities, and all experiences, emanate from God. Equally it is ignorance that avoids attributing personal responsibility in undesirable situations and blaming God! All of creation and existence follows patterns and laws that are both visible as well as unseen. Human consciousness enables us to follow reason and rationality. This much we are responsible for and beyond that we need to rely on the invisible or subtler domains. By fulfilling our part we come to realize the perfection of what is beyond us.

All natural patterns and laws have boundaries; when these are transgressed a new situation will arise, including destruction. These events stand as a lesson to those who are alive, in order that they may reflect and discover the right path of action for every situation. Whatever is in this cosmos, whether it is energy or matter, small or large, is subject to the laws that govern it. Wisdom is to recognize the bounds of these laws and their interactions, which are operative at all times. This can happen on a collective as well as a personal level. The Qur'an relates stories of several communities in Arabia, who were destroyed after warnings which they did not heed.

Man's True Impotence

And certainly we have already destroyed the likes of you, but is there anyone who will mind?

And everything they have done is in the writings.

And everything small and great is written down.

(54:51-3)

With all his intelligence and abilities man still cannot be sure of the outcome or destiny of most actions. Energy and matter interact in existence in subtle as well as obvious ways. Thus, it is not possible to plan the exact outcome of events, especially when emotions and inner values are concerned.

Although we may have a measure of interaction and influence on the worlds within and without us, we are truly impotent as far as the ultimate purpose of our creation is concerned. We were created to know the way and qualities of the Creator, Whom we were with before creation, Whom we are with during the experience of existence, and with Whom we will be forever. We are never independent and once that truth is recognized, the freedom of surrender will be chosen. This surrender is Islam.

The Inevitability of Death

And a soul will not die but with the permission of Allah; the term is fixed; and whoever desires the reward of this world, I shall give him of it, and whoever desires the reward of the hereafter I shall give him of it; and I will reward the grateful.

(3:145)

Death is an experience that every self will go through according to the unfolding of time and its destiny. No one can escape death, though its specific occurrence in time is usually unknown to man. The freedom man has lies in relation to his achieving desired objectives. If they are worldly and material, he is more likely to get them. The person who is in a state of gratitude, and thereby less agitated and concerned, is more likely to succeed, whether the objective is material or spiritual.

The Knowledge of the Outcome of Destiny

He it is Who created you from clay, then He decreed a term. And there is a term named with Him; still you doubt.

(6:2)

Every destiny is known in the non-time dimension but, for us who are in time, the particular and circumstantial outcome is not known. Man's destiny is known to God, for God is beyond time and space. Man, however, can play a crucial role in that destiny and make changes within the prescribed limitations that have been ordained for him.

The same issue is referred to, in the communal sense, in:

And for every nation there is a term, so when their term is come they shall not remain behind the least while, nor shall they go before.

(7:34)

Every creational phenomenon has a beginning and an end. In the same way that man eventually dies, his community or nation will also reach its end. Sometimes the end of a phenomenon may be postponed. At other times the course is so firmly set that there is no way of avoiding the final doom. However, all of these destinies are existential and within time frames. What really matters is the destiny and the course, which is timeless, and which occurs after departing from this world. Compared with this fixed destiny, other destinies become so insignificant. It is in this respect that the believer is exhorted to prepare himself and be ready for the next life.

The Ultimate Dependence

Say: I do not control for myself any harm, nor any benefit except what Allah pleases. Every nation has a term. When their term comes, they shall not then remain for an hour, nor can they go before (their time).

(10:49)

Man is not in control of destiny or the decree. Our power is limited to specific situations and times. We do not, ourselves, possess either harm or goodness unless God has willed it. We can see potentially what is harmful to us, and what is beneficial in limited ways. The confusion is due to

the mental illusion of being separate from the supreme Reality and Its universal governance.

If we see the one and only Reality, we do not see two. We will not see the outer events as chaotic happenings. Liberation is to abandon our will into His and accept the laws that govern the physical reality as well as the invisible domain. Once we do this, we see the beauty of the divine laws and accept them contentedly.

All Creation's Dependence upon the Creator

And there is no animal in the earth but on Allah is the sustenance of it, and He knows its resting place and its depository. All (things) are in a manifest book.

(11:6)

All living creatures draw provisions and energies from the creative Source.

The Ultimate Record

And those who disbelieve say: The hour shall not come upon us. Say: Yea! By my Lord, the Knower of the unseen, it shall certainly come upon you. Not the weight of an atom becomes absent from Him, in the heavens or in the earth, and neither less than that nor greater, but (all) is in a clear book.

(34:3)

No matter how insignificant something may appear to you, it has its place in the 'book' (patterns of the universe), and it cannot escape from the original design.

The following verse is along the same lines.

And Allah created you from dust, then from the life-germ, then He made you pairs. And no female bears, nor does she bring forth, except with His knowledge. And no one whose life is lengthened has his life lengthened, nor is aught diminished of one's life, but it is all in a book. Surely this is easy for Allah.

(35:11)

Nothing comes to earth nor exists within us, unless it is according to divine laws. We understand that whatever comes to us outwardly is

according to the laws of physiology, biology and anatomy. Equally, we are affected by what we call 'psychological' laws, which interact with the physical ones, although they are more subtle. They exist more at the energy levels and are less easily measurable, because they are not scientifically defined (or reproducible in controlled conditions).

Due to the natural complexity of the self we tend to dwell more on the bodily side of our existence. The Science of the Self, as practiced by spiritual masters, is not easy to follow by the uninitiated as it follows precise laws. These are clearly set out in the Qur'an. When the Qur'an says that all of this is written in a book, it means everything is according to the laws that govern existence.

Man's Freedom within God's Order

And give him sustenance from whence he thinks not. And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him. Surely Allah attains His purpose. Allah indeed has appointed a measure for everything.
(65:3)

God's order will prevail; He will attain His decree. There is a measure and order for everything, so man's transgressions are according to a measure, and are thus containable.

This aspect is also emphasized in:

He will forgive you some of your faults and grant you a delay to an appointed term. Surely the term of Allah when it comes is not postponed, did you but know.

(71:4)

For every beginning there is an end and every existence is limited within time and space.

Measure and Bounds

And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure.

(15:21)

Every pattern or design emanates from a Source that contains all possibilities. We are living in a material world which is ever connected and originates from the metaphysical realm. The effect of what manifests

into the creational reality can be markedly different from its origin –i.e., something subtle can become gross; also what is judged to be good under some circumstances can also be bad at other times, while its origin of pure consciousness is always neutral.

He...Who created everything, then ordained for it a measure.

(25:2)

He said: Our Lord is He Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal).

(20:50)

The last verse describes how once creation is manifested it is bound by Reality's laws. The resultant physical manifestations are fully discernible and describable.

And Who makes (things) according to a measure, then guides (them to their goal).

(87:3)

God guides what He has created to what He had intended it or measured it for.

Of a small seed He created him, then He made him according to a measure.

Then (as for) the way – He has made it easy (for him).

(80:19-20)

These verses show that God makes it easy for man to reach the awakening for which he has been created. This does not contradict the existence of man's relative freedom within his bounds. In fact, the freedom man is given is for the purpose of discovering the bounds, recognizing their perfection, and choosing to remain within those bounds; for he is programmed to undergo afflictions and punishment whenever he transgresses those bounds. As he dislikes afflictions, he will naturally choose if he is wise the path of seeking the knowledge of those bounds and keeping within them.

Fixed and Changeable Decrees

Say: I do not know whether that with which you are threatened be nigh or whether Allah will appoint it for a term.

The Knower of the unseen! So He makes His secrets known to none.

Except to him whom He chooses as an apostle; for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him,

So that He may know that they have truly delivered the messages of their Lord, and He encompasses what is with them, and He records the number of all things.

(72:25-8)

There are two types of decree; those which are changeable and those which are final. Our life on earth is based on uncertainty. This gives us the driving force to know and predict outcomes. Hope and expectations for a good life propel us towards higher consciousness and spiritual growth. God's mercy encompasses all of existence and its states.

The outcome or destiny of every situation is a mixture of the environment, which includes society and all other ecologies, as well as the personal individual action. The total outcome is dependent on all of these forces interacting with each other. As far as matters of personal implication are concerned – e.g. closing one's eyes – the individual can exert maximum influence. The more complex a situation, the less is the certainty of the outcome; such as politics or business which involve the opinions and desires of many.

The Prophets and other evolved beings attain the highest level of submission. Their state is such that on occasions they experience the unity between the physical 'in time' and the unseen 'non-time', which gives birth to all realities and their destinies. These Messengers of Truth are the interface between the permanent everlasting, all-encompassing Reality, and the changing realities. They are the connection between the All-Knower and the relative knower, man. They see the fixed screen upon which the movie of life is projected, and thereby sometimes see the next act before its actual projection.

Man's Unification with the Decree

So you did not slay them, but it was Allah Who slew them, and you did not smite when you smote (the enemy), but it was Allah Who smote, and that He might confer upon the believers a good gift from Himself. Surely Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

(8:17)

When man abandons himself totally to the will of God, he lives the decree itself by giving in totally to it and flowing along with events as they manifest themselves. This is like, when the actor completely takes on the script. Even when the role is difficult he completely identifies with it.

The historical reference of this verse is the Prophet Musa (Moses), who acted in accordance with the divine inspiration he received. He himself was astounded by what transpired. His perfect destiny matched the perfect decree. In his confrontation with the Pharaoh, he unified with the decree. His action was no longer his personal action. His will was aligned with God's will. This is the ultimate celebration of slavehood. When the part connects totally with the whole it manifests the characteristics of the whole. When the bondsman recognizes his real slavehood and merges into the consciousness of the Master, he acts with the supreme power of the One.

The Qur'an, the Overall Knowledge

And even if there were a Qur'an with which the mountains were made to pass away, or the earth were travelled over with it, or the dead were made to speak thereby. Nay! The commandment is wholly Allah's. Have not yet those who believe known that if Allah pleases He would certainly guide all the people? And (as for) those who disbelieve, there will not cease to afflict them because of what they do a repelling calamity, or it will alight close by their abodes, until the promise of Allah comes about. Surely Allah will not fail in (His) promise.

(13:31)

The Holy Qur'an is the word of God. It is the source or root of all knowledge. The Qur'an, or the Book of 'Collection' as the name implies contains everything visible and subtle, and the mysteries of the universe and creation – God Himself.

The natural and healthy attitude of man regarding the ways of the Creator is to reflect and understand the higher patterns or forces that govern the base ones. It is futile to act against the ways of the Divine. Our abilities are limited to space and time, and our freedom is minute in comparison to Allah's Immensity.

It is natural that those who live according to faith wish the others to know the Qur'an and follow it. Yet some of creation is so gross that God says in a *hadith qudsi* (divinely revealed tradition):

I have created them for the Fire and it does not matter (or affect me).

All experiences in this world are based on duality, and this is how we learn discrimination and appropriate choice. In this world there is health and illness; man is programmed to desire health, so he will discover the laws that bring about health and those that cause illness. He will, therefore, choose to follow the first set and avoid the second.

God has created this world as a training ground and equipped us with the necessary means of interacting with and analyzing situations in order to fully understand them, see the underlying unifying factor behind them and thereby discover the truth that pervades all of creation. The more we question the perfection of Reality, the more we display our ignorance and isolation from the everlasting truth - God.

One of the key words in this verse is '*amr*' which means command. The ultimate power belongs to God and human beings are given a small portion of that ability to act as agents or stewards of God on earth.

Reality Guides to Itself, by Itself

Whomsoever Allah guides, he is the one who follows the right way. And whomsoever He causes to err will be the losers.

(7:178)

Whoever really comprehends the meaning of the laws or the decrees that govern existence, and accepts the bounds, will act and evolve successfully in the visible and causal realm whilst guided by the invisible powers.

As for those who have been exposed to the laws and do not live by them they will taste afflictions and confusions. With knowledge comes the responsibility to act according to reason and the heart's inspiration. God or nature is blameless for our sufferings.

Heedlessness

And certainly we have created for hell many of the jinn and the men. And they have hearts with which they do not understand, and they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear; they are as cattle, nay, they are in worse errors; these are the heedless ones.

(7:179)

The closed hearts have no lights or understanding. Eyes that see but do not comprehend or ears that do not respond belong to those lesser creatures. These senses are the means by which we access higher levels of understanding and consciousness leading to God-consciousness and enlightenment.

Prevaricators and the Role of the Prophets

And they who claim association (with Allah) say: If Allah had pleased, we would not have served anything beside Allah, (neither) we nor our fathers, nor would we have prohibited anything without (an order from) Him. Thus did those before them; is then aught incumbent upon the apostles except a plain delivery (of the message).

And certainly We raised in every nation an apostle saying: Serve Allah and shun the Shaytan. So there were some of them whom God guided and there were others upon whom error (loss) was due; therefore travel in the land, then see what was the end of the rejecters (deniers of truth).

If you desire for their guidance, yet surely Allah does not guide him who leads astray, nor shall they have any helpers.

(16:35-7)

When the Unity of the all-encompassing Reality is explained to the common people the reaction can be that if God wanted us to see everything as part of this Unity, He would have made us see that.

When the Adamic consciousness arose in the state of the heavenly garden, it was in perfect harmony and equilibrium with truth. Adam had not heard falsehood until he listened to the voice of Shaytan (Satan). Man's inherent tendency is to seek the permanent, the reliable, the tranquil and avoid distractions of Shaytan. Adam, however, was misled by Shaytan and only remembered the warning of God afterwards. Thus the world of dualities and the need for choice and human will arose.

Every state is subject to duality: obedience and disobedience, truth and falsehood, tranquillity and agitation, gatheredness and dispersion. Adam had been created to evolve from a state of unquestioning obedience to one whereby his recognition and submission to the perfect will of his Creator

would be founded on free will, after duality and uncertainty had been experienced.

Man has been given the choice of recognizing the way of Unity, adhering to it and expanding within its bounds. Prophets are sent to confirm this state to man and to encourage him not to transgress the bounds, beyond which lies the abyss of destruction and loss. Man has been created to worship and adore the Creator with full freedom of choice, in the safety of the haven of eternal Unity.

These verses are for those who are concerned that others be guided. Yet God will not guide those who are in denial of truth. A person is either guided or he is at a loss.

The Ways of Reality

And We did not send any apostle but with the language of his people, so that he might explain to them clearly; then Allah makes whom He pleases err and He guides whom He pleases, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

(14:4)

The messenger needs to connect and relate by the culture and language of his people. The messenger is the means that connects human consciousness with supreme Reality, in order to bridge the gap between earthly limitations and spiritual lights and liberation.

The Gift of Discrimination

And Allah has created you and what you make.

(37:96)

God has given us the power to act, and He has given us reason, intelligence, and discernment that can guide our actions. Through the wisdom of intellect we can check and correct our conduct and actions. We can refer, with this foundation to the light of the soul and higher wisdom.

Why Diversity and Duality

And if Allah had pleased He would surely have made them a single community, but He makes whom He pleases enter into His mercy, and the unjust it is that shall have no guardian or helper.

(42:8)

Life on earth is a challenge and preparation for the hereafter. Animals have no choice but to follow their physical impulses, while man needs to learn and awaken to a code of conduct that will enable him to achieve his highest potential. He has to learn the ways that will bring about the desired states of sustainable goodness to body, mind and heart.

We are programmed to dislike uncertainty and desire predictability and knowledge. Whoever ignores this innate tendency will be confused and at a loss. To remain in darkness and ignorance is a self-inflicted injustice and affliction. In this case help and guidance from outsiders is unlikely to be of use. Allah's light and guidance to such souls is veiled.

Why Some People Cause Themselves Injustice

What! is he whose evil deed is made fair-seeming to him so much so that he considers it good? Now surely Allah makes err whom He pleases and guides aright whom He pleases, so let not your soul waste away in grief for them; surely Allah is cognizant of what they do.

(35:8)

We often tend to justify our intentions and actions, whether right or wrong. Erroneous actions are often made agreeable to the perpetrator, as he has to live with himself. God has created us all with an awareness and desire for unity in actions and thoughts.

The light of our souls and the higher element in all of us makes us grieve for those who are disadvantaged and unhappy. Yet, we are powerless to change the laws of Reality. Some people must suffer from their mistakes, until they choose the path of knowledge and action based upon the natural laws, seen or unseen. God does not change people unless they change their ways and habits.

The Disconnected Ones

Surely We have placed chains on their necks, and these reach up to their chins, so they have their heads raised aloft.

And We have made before them a barrier and a barrier behind them, then We have covered them over so that they do not see.

And it is alike to them whether you warn them or warn them not:
they do not believe.

(36:8-10)

When we are disconnected from higher consciousness it is like having a barrier in front of us, as well as behind. This isolation from the flow of reality is a cause of confusion and misery. If there is reference to the intellect and heart the barriers may become less solid and the light of higher consciousness flow through to liberate one from the worldly exile of the soul.

Modes of Destiny

The following are a collection of Qur'anic verses on the different facets of destiny as have been transmitted from the Prophet and Imams.

The first mode is *knowledge*:

...and surely he was possessed of knowledge because We had given him knowledge, but most people do not know.

(12:68)

The destiny of the Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), to whom the verse refers, was to come to know the earthly reasons as well as Allah's will.

The second is *announcement*, and make something commonly known to a people:

And We had declared (make known) unto the Children of Israel in the Book...

(17:4)

The third is that *of judgment and justice at its different levels*:

And Allah judges with the truth...

(40:20)

The fourth mode is *saying*, as described in:

And We revealed to him this decree...

(15:66)

The fifth deals with *finishing, terminating*:

But when We decreed death for him...

(34:14)

The sixth is that of *order or command*:

And your Lord has commanded that you shall not serve (any)
but Him...

(17:23)

The seventh relates to *creation*:

So He ordained them seven heavens in two periods, and revealed
in every heaven its affair; and We adorned the lower heaven with
brilliant stars and (made it) to guard; that is the decree of the
Mighty, the Knowing.

(41:12)

Initially creation takes place in biological time, then the souls experience
infinite time after death. The last of the seven layers of heavens is the
physical heaven that we on earth witness above us. Both heavens and earth
were created in two periods or two modes. One of these is the visible
experiential state, the other the unseen.

The eighth is *action*:

...therefore decide what you are going to decide (act)

(20:72)

This means to *exercise judgment and act sincerely*.

The ninth mode is that of *completion*:

So when Musa had fulfilled the term, and he journeyed with his
family...

(28:29)

In this context it means to bring a matter to a conclusion and end.

The tenth is the *close of an affair*. This is in reference to *destiny with
finality*:

...the matter is decreed concerning which you enquired.

(12:41)

When it is said that affairs are all by the judgment of God, or by God's
knowledge, it means that the matter is decreed concerning us who will
experience it. God knows the situation and acts according to His perfect
justice.

Summary

Decrees are the laws and natural patterns and ways, which are often perceived as natural and predictable. These laws are visible, as well as subtle and unseen. In the ultimate outcome they can be superimposed or interactive with each other.

Destiny is the outcome of the patterns and laws that are in existence. Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib compared the decree to the soul and action to the body. Soul without body cannot be discerned and body without soul has no life. The two combine to produce what is called destiny. This combination brings about a situation which is completely under the laws that govern existence, yet gives the individual a certain measure of freedom within these constraints. Thus he may learn that the ultimate freedom is total abandonment into it, intelligently and experientially. This total abandonment is based on spiritual certainty. The relative lack of resistance, due to certainty, brings about a freedom from earthly illusions and confusions.

Freedom is often connected with superstitious abandonment or detachment to which some of us are prone. Real freedom belongs to pure consciousness without any iota of movement, change or mental activity. It is the domain of the soul or spirit and not body or mind.

The Creator of this world brought about existence according to the most precise and multifaceted laws. We are part of these overall laws but our own arena is a very limited one. If we can discern the laws that govern our inner and outer being, and unify our desires, intentions and actions with the overall decree, then we have succeeded. This state comes when we have stopped our expectations and desires. Then we have fully accepted our destiny because destiny is only our experience of the decree. Our only freedom lies in whether we choose to recognize this truth or not. Liberation comes with unity between the mind and heart of the seeker, who then yields to the universal soul – Allah.

Prophetic Traditions and Teachings

Introduction

The direct usability, authenticity and clarity of the traditions are the key to this selection. The majority of these traditions are taken from the *Kitab al-Tawhid* (The Book of Unity) of Shaykh al-Saduq, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Husayn ibn Musa ibn Babawayh al-Saduq al-Qummi, who is called the Chief of Hadith Narrators. He was born in Qum in 306 AH/918 AD.

He is among the most revered authorities in Shi'a history and his studies are well covered in traditional books. He is reported to have written more than three hundred volumes on divine knowledge; two hundred and forty five of these volumes are recorded as having been copied but only a few of these are available today. He is the author of one of the four source books of Shi'a Jurisprudence.

Shaykh al-Saduq's book on *tawhid* (divine unity, union, belief in Allah's Oneness), from which the majority of the following sayings are taken, is a collection of aspects of Unity, meanings of God's Names and Attributes, and various discourses on spirituality. Commentaries on this book have been made by a number of great spiritual masters. It was printed in 1285 AH and there are also many known handwritten manuscripts.

The two other main sources of traditions, Shaykh al-Harrani and Fayd al-Kashani, were (respectively) the fourth century and tenth century after Hijrah authorities of their day.

Creation and the Command of God

The Prophet says:

'Truly Allah has created mankind and He knew in which direction they were heading; He bade them and forbade them. Whatever He ordered them to do, He had made it possible for them to fulfil it. Whatever He had forbidden them to do, He had made it possible for them to abstain from.'

God's ways or the natural chains of cause and effect are in perfect harmony, bringing about justice and equilibrium. It is incumbent upon man to discover the means that will lead him to goodness and the bounds that will protect him. As his intelligence develops, man will keep to the right path and will avoid the pitfalls. All this happens within God's creation for all creation has occurred with His knowledge and by His decree.

The Origin of Good and Evil

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq quotes the Prophet as saying:

'Whoever alleges that Allah, the Exalted, orders evil and indecency has lied about Allah. And whoever alleges that goodness and evil are beyond Allah's will has excluded Allah from His power. And whoever alleges that disobediences are devoid of the power of Allah has lied about Allah and whoever has lied about Allah, Allah will make him enter the Fire.'

... We test you all through the bad and the good as trial, and to Us you will all return.

(21:35)

We have a clear indication here that both 'good' and 'evil' are subsumed under the all-encompassing power of God.

A companion of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq said that he heard him saying:

'In the same way that the origin of goodness and provisions are from Allah, the Exalted, the origin of evil is from you, even though the decree has permitted it.'

It is related from Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib that one day he was questioned about the decree.

He asked: 'Shall I speak briefly or at length?'

His companions replied: 'But briefly.'

He said: 'Allah is more splendid than to desire obscenity, and more glorious than to allow in His kingdom that which He does not intend.'

Ultimately everything is according to God's decree but it is not God's decree that we perform evil actions. This is the outcome of our own

deviation from the path of Islam. God's decree is that He wants us to discriminate, to recognize and follow what is good and avoid what is bad.

Compulsion and Delegation

The question was posed to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq: 'Are humans compelled to their own actions?' The Imam replied:

'Allah, the Exalted, is more merciful upon His creation than to compel them to sin and then to punish them for it. And Allah is more glorious than to want something that does not happen.'

The nature of Reality is reflected in man's innate desire for goodness. We all desire to have good health and to live a peaceful life without wants and upheavals. It is inconceivable that God, Who is the Source of all mercy and goodness, compels His creation to erroneous and sinful acts in order to punish them. Indeed punishment, which is feared, is created in order to deflect us from error.

God, the Glorious, has within His power all creational possibilities, so He is capable of all.

It is further related from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq:

'As far as decree is concerned, people are of three types. One man alleges that Allah forces people to sin. This man has wronged Allah in His judgment, and therefore he is a *kafir* [one who denies the truth]. Another alleges that the affair is delegated to them. He has weakened Allah's authority, thus he is a *kafir*. Thirdly a man alleges that Allah has ordered His bondsmen by virtue of what they are able to carry out, and that He does not expect of them what they cannot carry out. If he does well, he praises Allah; if he misbehaves he asks for forgiveness. This is the mature Muslim (who is capable of judgment).'

The merciful Creator wants to show His creation His perfect justice and capability by creating them in such a manner that they actively participate in their spiritual evolution. So He only demands and expects from them what they are capable of. If they do well, they can only praise their Creator, and if they commit an error, they should recognize the nature of that error, see how it occurs, ask for forgiveness and return to the right path.

It is related that Muhammad ibn 'Ajlan said: I asked Imam Ja'far

al-Sadiq:

‘Has Allah delegated the affairs to his bondsmen?’

The answer was:

‘Allah is more generous than to delegate to them. Allah is far too just to compel a bondsman to action and then to chastise him for it.’

The subject matter dealt with in this tradition is similar to that discussed in the preceding traditions in this section, so the same commentaries apply.

On this same point the following saying is related from Imam ‘Ali al-Rida. Mention was made of ‘compulsion’ and ‘delegation’, and the Imam said:

‘Shall I not give you a foundation on this issue so that you will never differ over it anymore nor quarrel with anyone but that you overcome him?’

And he continued:

‘Allah, the Exalted, is not obeyed by compulsion nor is He disobeyed by being overcome, nor does He ignore His bondsmen in His kingdom. He is the owner of what He has made them own and capable upon what He has made them capable of.’

The nature of creation is such that we are not separate from its totality. The Creator has given man his innate tendencies and his faculty of reasoning in order that he may be shown that total interconnection. This enables man to follow the natural laws by his own choice. When he does this, obedience to God’s Will becomes his chosen path, rather than forced submission.

God’s mercy is such that there is a limit to the extent man is able to transgress and wreak havoc. Indeed all man’s capabilities are within and subservient to God’s capabilities. His nature encourages him to unify with the intended laws. When he chooses to transgress, he is going against his nature and God’s Will. Life on earth affords him all the possibilities to discover this fact for himself.

The following tradition is quoted from Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq:

‘It is neither compulsion nor delegation. It is a matter between two affairs.’

And the Imam was asked:

‘What is a matter between two affairs?’

He replied:

‘The parable of that is like a man whom you saw about to commit a sin and you forbade him against it but he did not listen, so you left him and he committed that sin. The fact that he did not accept your order and your leaving him does not make you the one who ordered him to sin.’

God’s way is to discourage man from committing errors and sins or doing anything that brings about a state of disequilibrium. However, if man chooses to transgress, it is not God Who has ordered him to do this. It is man’s erroneous choice. The suffering that comes from his error is created to deflect him back to the correct path. It is an act of love and mercy, not of punishment.

Imam ‘Ali al-Rida was asked:

‘Has Allah delegated His affair to His bondsmen?’

The Imam said:

‘Allah is more dignified than that.’

The man said:

‘So has He compelled them to sins?’

The Imam said:

‘Allah is more just and wise than that.’

Then the Imam said:

‘Allah, the Exalted, has said: “O Son of Adam, I am more worthy of good deeds than you. You are more worthy of your sins than I. You have committed sins with the power that I placed in you.”’

If man exercises the power God has bestowed on him wisely, he may grow in excellence and move along the path of God’s decree in peace, tranquillity and knowledgeable submission.

In the following tradition Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq is asked:

‘Inform me regarding the differences that occur amongst our followers.’

The man added:

'It is with regard to compulsion and delegation.'

The Imam said:

'Then ask me.'

The man said:

'Has Allah compelled His bondsmen to commit sins?'

The Imam said:

'Allah is a greater compeller than that.'

The man then asked:

'Has He delegated it to them?'

The Imam said:

'Allah is more capable (powerful) upon them than that.'

The man said:

'What is then this affair? May Allah give you the best of states.'

The Imam turned his hand up and down two or three times, then said:

'If I answered you, then I would commit *kufir*.'

There is an apparent conflict that exists between 'compulsion' and what appears to be the freedom bestowed upon man.

The Imam, knowing that God is the all-powerful Creator of all, cannot intimate that man has any power other than that which comes from God. Although it appears to man that he has a certain power by delegation, the assumption that this power has been bestowed upon him would be regarded as an aspect of *shirk* (*associating other-than-Allah with Allah*):

God is One. All affairs are from Him, by Him, to Him. It is for this reason that the Imam wishes to resolve an apparent conflict without adding further to the confusion by covering up the truth.

Once man looks deeply into the certain measure of freedom that he has, he discovers that in order for him to attain an optimum state, there is only one specific choice for each situation that confronts him – although he may not realize at the time what this choice is.

It is related that a man came to Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

‘O Commander of the Faithful, inform me about the decree.’

The Imam replied:

‘It is a deep sea. Do not enter into it.’

The man asked:

‘O Commander of the Faithful, tell me about the decree.’

The Imam said:

‘It is a dark road, do not set foot on it.’ The man then said:

‘O Commander of the Faithful, inform me about the decree.’

The Imam said:

‘It is Allah’s secret, so do not carry that burden.’

The man said again:

‘Inform me about the decree.’

The Imam said:

‘If you refuse my advice, I will ask you: Was the mercy of Allah before the deeds of the bondsmen or were the deeds of the bondsmen before the mercy of Allah?’

So the man said in reply:

‘The mercy of Allah was bestowed upon the bondsmen before their deeds.’

The Imam said:

‘Get up and greet your brother, for now he has embraced Islam and before that he was a *kafir*.’ And the man went away, but not far. Then again, the man turned to Imam ‘Ali and asked him:

‘Is it by the original wish of Allah that we get up, sit, and are constricted and expanded?’

So the Imam commented:

‘You are still within the (original) wish (of Allah), but I would ask you three things. Tell me, did Allah shape His bondsmen as He wished or as they wished?’

The man said:

'As He wished.'

The Imam said:

'Did Allah create bondsmen for what He wants or for what they want?'

The man answered:

'For what He wants.'

The Imam said:

'Do they come to Him on the Day of Judgment as He wants them or as they want?'

The man said:

'They will come to Him as He wants them.'

The Imam said:

'Now get up. There is nothing more for you as far as the will of Allah is concerned.'

We have seen from the preceding traditions that there is no delegation, yet individuals do have responsibility. This is what is meant by free will. It is to be understood that this will is encompassed within God's will. So ultimately it is God's will that prevails.

When Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib asked of the man: 'Was the mercy of God before the deeds of the bondsmen?' and the man replied: 'Yes', his affirmation signified that man's inherent tendency is to adore and worship God; for this is the purpose of His creation.

When Imam 'Ali further asked the man to inform him of three things concerning the will of God, the man confirmed that God creates the bondsmen as He wills, that God creates the bondsmen for what He wants, and that the bondsmen will come to Him on the Day of Reckoning as He wants them. By this it is meant that although our behaviour and actions may be manifested in diverse and seemingly contradictory ways, all of our actions stem from one Source, the divine Reality, from Who all comes.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is quoted as saying:

'Neither compulsion nor delegation, but a station between the two stations.'

The Imam describes this 'station between two stations' as follows:

'Goodness of character, emptiness of the chest (purification of the innermost), respite in time, provision for the journey, and the causes that make a person embark on an action.'

This saying describes the entire journey of man in this life. First he must develop his character. This also includes his faculties, discrimination and the growth of his '*aql*' (faculty of reason) if he is to reach a high level of cognizance. Man is the highest among creation for he is the only creature that has a rational self that can express itself. It is about man that God has revealed:

... thus has He made them subservient to you, that you may magnify Allah because He has guided you aright; and give good news to those who do good (to others).

(22:37)

And He it is Who has made the sea subservient that you may eat fresh flesh from it and bring forth from it ornaments which you wear...

(16:14)

There are many verses in the Qur'an that show man has been given the potential to reach the highest state:

Certainly We created man in the best of forms.

(95:4)

Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability; for it is (the benefit of) what it has earned, and upon it (the evil of) what it has wrought...

(2:286)

So within the capacity that has been bestowed upon the individual, each can attain the fullness of his character. Also no faculty is taken away unless a replacement is given. The weakening of eyesight with age, for example, can be compensated by the growth of insight and wisdom. It is up to the individual as he grows older to gain the inner knowledge that will make up for his naturally deteriorating physical sight.

Regarding the second aspect in this tradition, which is the 'emptiness of the chest', man must try to purify himself and render his heart clear and pure.

The third station is a 'respite in time', so that man is given the opportunity to experiment and learn what is right for him – i.e., what is dictated by his

primal state and what is not.

The fourth station is 'provision for the journey' so that he gains the right provisions and recognizes that the real poverty is poverty of knowledge.

The final station, 'the causes that make a person embark on an action', is for the individual to discover that every action is the result of an intention. These intentions emanate from the innermost; the purer the intention, the clearer and more effective the action. We see from this the importance of the connection between actions and intentions. If this does not exist, hypocrisy will prevail.

... They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts; and Allah best knows what they conceal.

(3:167)

There is an admonishment for those who are weak in faith in:

O you who believe! why do you say that which you do not do?

(61:2)

On the other hand, there may be situations where a person has to say something he does not believe in because he is under pressure. In this case the person may be relieved:

'He who disbelieves in Allah after his having believed, not he who is compelled while his heart is at rest on account of faith, but he who opens (his) breast to disbelief-- on these is the wrath of Allah, and they shall have a grievous chastisement.'

(16:106)

Allah does not call you to account for what is vain in your oaths, but He will call you to account for what your hearts have earned, and Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing.

(2:225)

In other words, God will not hold you responsible for what is not really meant.

By studying the meaning of these five characteristics we will reach the conclusion that while man's destiny is determined to some degree by creational limitations, he also possesses a certain measure of freedom.

It is related that Imam 'Ali al-Rida said:

‘Shall I not give you in this respect a foundation that you will not differ over nor can anyone argue with you regarding it, but that you overcome his argument?’

They said:

‘If you think it is proper.’

The Imam said:

‘Allah, be He exalted, is not obeyed by sheer force nor is He disobeyed by being overcome and He does not neglect His bondsmen in His kingdom, for He is the owner of what He has made them capable of. If His bondsmen acknowledge and adhere to His obedience, He does not cause that not to emanate nor will He cause it to be deprived or not to take place. And if they disobey and He wishes to be between them and that action, He will certainly do so. And if He does not intervene and they have carried out that action, it is not He who has put them into it. And he who understands the full bounds of this speech will overcome whoever argues with him.’

God wants man, His highest creation, to appreciate the primal laws of creation, to see that they are in perfect harmony, majesty and beauty, and to recognize that these laws are for his benefit. The laws span a very wide spectrum which encompasses all physical laws and realities as well as the subtler non-physical or metaphysical realities; most of which are beyond the grasp of the mind and intellect. They are also the laws that link physical realities with the non-physical, non-spatial energies. They include the sub-atomic world where intricate interchanges between matter and energy take place. Man is not separate from these laws, nor is he independent of their Source. He must taste and experience these patterns, submit to them, and thereby come closer to higher consciousness and eternal life. This is the true meaning and purpose of surrender.

The Creator will never be overcome, nor will His creation be damaged or halted by man’s transgressions. The Creator has not neglected His creation in His kingdom for they are all subject to certain limits and bounds. However, within these limitations they are given the freedom to exercise their faculty of reasoning. They were able to learn that submission is the only way for efficient, successful survival and subsequent awakening. The intelligent man soon realizes that he has no power of his own. His power

is loaned to him for the duration of his life on this earth. If he chooses to act correctly, then it can be regarded as his choice. The knowledge of that choice comes from an inner awareness or conscience that man has been endowed with. However, if a man makes a mistake, the blame is not God's. It is he, himself, who has put himself in that position by his ignorance, or his misplaced desires or expectations.

This world is like a child's playpen, which has been created in order for us to have a testing ground. According to the extent of our ability and pursuit of excellence we are given the opportunity to recognize the meaning and purpose of creation. We will come thus, to acknowledge and recognize the great attributes and qualities of the glorious Creator, Whose nature is beyond limitations and time, Who permeates all of His creations and connects them universally. The knowledge of this truth is the ultimate awareness which creation seeks in all its endeavours. When a person awakes to this realization, he feels liberated. If he does not, he will remain alienated and confused.

Will and Power

It is related from Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib that the Prophet said:

'Allah, be He exalted, says: O Son of Adam, it is by My will that you can will for yourself; and by My wish that you can wish; and by the grace of My blessings upon you that you had the strength to be disobedient; and by My protection, aid and goodness to you that you have been able to perform your obligations to Me. Thus I am more worthy of your good deeds than you, and you are more worthy of your evil deeds and wrong doings than Me. Goodness is from Me for you by My beginning and delegating it to you. And evilness is from Me to you according to what you have reaped as a punishment. And it is by My kindness to you that you have the power to obey (Me, and) it is because of your misjudgement of Me that you have become despondent of My mercy. So praise is for Me and proof is upon you by clear evidence and I will have My way upon you because of disobedience.'

'The reward of your good deeds rests with Me by good action. I have not neglected warning you nor have I deprived you whenever you have embarked on action, nor have I expected from you more

than your capabilities, nor have I burdened you with trusts except to your ability to bear them and take upon yourself also. I am content in Myself with you in accordance with your contentment in yourself with Me. I have accepted from you to Myself what you have accepted to yourself from Me,'

It is related from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq:

'Allah has ordered and did not wish, and had the wish but did not order. He gave *Iblis* [Satan] the order to prostrate but He did not want him to prostrate himself for if He wanted he would have prostrated himself. And He forbade Adam from the eating of the tree, yet His wish was that Adam could eat from it because if He did not wish Adam could not have eaten.'

It is related from Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib:

'Allah has two types of wills and wishes [desires]: the will of certainty and the will of intention. He prohibits but He wishes it. He orders but He does not wish it. Do you not see that He ordered Adam and his wife 'Do not eat from the tree' but He wished it (to be). And if He did not wish them to eat from that tree, the will of their desire would not have overcome Allah's desire.'

God gave Adam the power to discriminate and to choose. In the Garden there were no needs but there was the tree of ideas and consciousness as separate from Supreme Consciousness – God. However, Adam would not have known the disgrace or disadvantage of thoughts of separation and independence of God until he had done it. So Adam's will to disobey existed only because God had permitted him the possibility of disobedience. Adam had only been obedient up to that point. He also obeyed Shaytan through forgetfulness although he had been pre-warned against Shaytan. So it was Adam, not God, who was responsible for this act of disobedience.

The overall purpose of creation is for man to waken to the knowledge of his Creator, by recognizing the ways of the Creator within him and without. Man cannot ever overcome God's will. It is within God's wish that man will transgress in order that he might discover repentance and corrective actions. We must also remember that God has created him with the capacity of suffering the consequences of transgression.

Man is the ultimate creation because he contains within himself a sacred

soul which knows what is right and what is wrong at all times. As there is also an experiential Reality that confirms this, he is set on an autonomic system of self-correction. The animals do not have this knowledge as their souls are of limited capacity.

The Extent of the Capability of the Bondsman

It is related that ‘Abayah ibn Ruba’i al-Asadi asked Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib about *istita’at* (your ability, capability).

The Imam said:

‘You asked about your ability, that you may possess it with God or beside God?’

‘Abayah kept quiet.’

The Imam again asked:

‘Tell me, O ‘Abayah?’

And he said:

‘But what shall I say?’

The Imam said:

‘If you say that you possess it with Allah I will kill you, and if you say that you possess it beside Allah I will kill you.’

So ‘Abayah said:

‘O Commander of the Faithful, then what shall I say?’

The Imam said:

‘You ought to say that you possess it by Allah, Who possesses it irrespective of you and if He bestows it upon you it is His gift, and if He slips it off you that is His affliction. He is the owner of what He has enabled you to own and He is capable of what He has enabled you to be capable of. Have you not heard people asking about “*la hawlah wa la quwwata illa bi’llah*” [there is no power nor capability except by Allah]?’

‘Abayah then said:

‘What does it mean?’

The Imam said:

‘(There is) no way of diverting from disobedience to Allah except by taking refuge in Allah (except by the protection of Allah) and there is no power for us to obey Allah except by the help of Allah.’

‘Abayah then jumped up and kissed his hands and feet.

When a person is stripped of any of the usual outer powers or abilities, it may well be for his inner benefit. In this respect, it is like a father teaching his son new responsibilities. The father is patient and compassionate and allows his son to make mistakes. However, if he chooses to stray, he will earn for himself, through his wrongdoing, a difficult and unhappy situation. This freedom of action and choice is given to all the offspring of Adam and they will experience its consequences.

Freedom, Action and Outcome

Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq said:

‘Decree and destiny are two creations (or attributes) from Allah’s creation. Allah increases in His creation what he wishes.’

This tradition means that there are two zones of creations and two systems, each with its own intricate laws. Before creation, neither measures nor destinies existed. Decree and destiny are stages into which creations are caught, evolved and changed, until eventually they reach their final direct experiential destinies in God, Who can increase or reduce in His creation what He wills.

It is related that someone said to Imam ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin:

‘May Allah make me be sacrificed for you. Is it by decree that people will receive that which comes to them or by their actions?’

The Imam said:

‘Decree and action are to one another like soul and body; for the soul without a body cannot sense, and the body without a soul is a picture with no motion in it. And if they combine they will gain strength and usefulness. This is how action and decree are. If decree had fallen upon action, you would not have known the

Creator from the created. And decree would be something that you would not have sensed. And if action was not in line with the decree, it would not move to completion, but by their union they gain strength and in Allah there is aid for His righteous bondsmen.'

Decree has been attributed to God in the sense that He has moulded it and set its bounds, its being and non-being.

...And there is a measure with Him of everything. (13:8)

If it were not according to a measure, the outcome of the laws would not have been known. The action of man interacts with what is for him, and what is incumbent upon him.

Action and decree are like body and spirit; without a body nothing is felt, without actions the decree will not be understood. Action is from where decree descends or is manifested.

Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin continued:

'The most tyrannical of all beings is he who sees his tyranny as justice and the justice of the guided ones as tyranny. Is it not the case that the bondsman has four eyes: two eyes through which he sees the affairs of his next life, and two eyes through which he sees the affairs of this world? If Allah wants good for a bondsman, He will open his two eyes which are in his heart, so that He observes with them his faults.'

(Another reference to this saying gives the following as the last phrase: 'He sees by them the unseen').

If we see our faults and isolate them, the rest which we have not seen will become clearer.

The Saying continued:

'And if He wills other than that, He will leave the heart with what is in it.'

Then the Imam turned to the man, who had asked him about the decree and told him:

'This is from Him and that is from Him.'

By this the Imam means that the opening of the 'eyes of the heart' or the leaving them closed is according to the decree. This indicates that the knowledge of the secret of the decree and contentment with it is for him

whose heart's eye has opened.

Here is an indicator of one of the secrets. The knowledge of the secret of the decree lies in contentment; for it is contentment that opens the inner eye.

There cannot be two obsessions in the heart at the same time. If love of this world is in the heart, the love of the next world is out of it. So how can the heart's eye for the next world open if it only contains this world? The Imam is hinting about contentment. It is this contentment that enables one to understand the secret of the decree. If we want to know God's Will, then we must stop all other thoughts or desires.

God's Covenant with Man

A man said to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq:

'May I be sacrificed for you. What do you say concerning decree and destiny?'

He replied:

'I say that Allah, the Exalted, when He collects His bondsmen on the Day of Reckoning, will ask them about His covenant with them and He will not ask about His destiny upon them.'

God's covenant is ingrained in the heart of His creation. Man is, at all times, seeking his inner and outer harmony. He desires union and dislikes dispersion; knowledge and love are sought because they unite and cement.

The world of matter and physical senses is only a laboratory for us to discover that we are already united and controlled by our Creator. Waking up and acknowledging this Reality is upholding the covenant.

The actual existential environment in which we are placed is part of our destiny at that time. Although there is a relationship between the degree of the individual's destiny and the relevant environmental factors, we know that a serious seeker will reach for and surrender to his covenant, irrespective of what is around him. In fact, the greatest upholders of God's covenant, the Prophets, were destined to live under circumstances that would seem more likely to have hindered rather than enhanced their quest for realization. Many suffered a great deal of restriction and constriction regarding the physical world.

God will neither question us nor make allowances for the outer set-up in

which we have been placed; rather, we will be questioned about the degree of our realization of the purpose of His creation. We will be asked about whether we have utilized our position and circumstances to the utmost and the extent of our adherence to its laws – i.e., the covenant between God and His creation that they know and worship Him.

One's individual destiny and the particular role one finds oneself playing are like a script in the theatre of life. In this parable of destiny, the covenant is our responsibility to know the Scriptwriter, and the reason behind the play. We are programmed sufficiently towards that end by the driving powers within ourselves. If those driving powers are guided by growing discrimination then our lusts and desires will end up in modesty and contentment; our anger and expectations will turn to courage and patience. This will result in total surrender to the will of the Scriptwriter, with its ensuing exposure to divine knowledge, thereby fulfilling the covenant.

The details of the script and the specific role of the actor, therefore, are of little relevance when one is questioned by the Scriptwriter. They are only relevant to the actor himself, who is so absorbed in his role that he is blind to everything else. God's mercy is manifested in the continuously changing roles He presents to His actors. However, if the poor actor fails to realize the object of the exercise, which is submission and acceptance of the script as it reaches him, his blindness will imprison him within his own role, and those limitations will be his hell.

Specific individual destinies are of small significance with regard to the discovery of the Limitless; for the Owner of the entire world there is little difference between he who owns an ounce of gold and the owner of a gold mine.

Knowledge of the Decree

Whilst Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib was marshalling his troops on the day of the Battle of Siffin, Mu'awiyah was awaiting him impatiently. Imam 'Ali was upon a horse of the Prophet, in his hand was the spear of the Prophet, and he was wearing the two pronged sword. One of his companions said to the Imam:

'Be on your guard, O Commander of the Faithful, for I fear that this cursed one will assassinate you.'

The Imam said:

‘If you are saying that he is not to be trusted with respect to his religion and he is the most accursed of those who came out against the guided ones, it is right. But it is sufficient for me that I have destiny as my guard.’

‘There is no one unless he has with him angels that protect him from falling into wells, or when a wall falls on him, or from any other evil that may afflict him. And when his destined time comes to him, these angels leave him to what is coming to him and what is going to afflict him.’

‘And as for me, when the appointed time comes, the most evil of them will come forth and will sever this from that (pointing to his beard and head) and will move this from that. It is a firm appointment, and it is a promise that has no lie in it.’

If we consider the example of the child playing in the playground, we can infer that initially the child has been given a small module to experiment with. If he behaves according to the laws, then he will be exposed to more, for he has shown that he can be trusted. This is what is meant by certainty in the spiritual sense.

Certainty comes to us if we take the responsibility for the knowledge of destiny. Otherwise, it is barred from us because we are still preoccupied with our own small affairs. The certainty that comes to the hearts of the Prophets, Imams, the mystics or the righteous people resembles a window opening onto a scene, which we are only permitted to glimpse if we are not going to be shocked or frightened by what we see. This will only happen when the lower self or ego has diminished.

With regards to the future Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib has said: ‘It is a dark road, do not be on it.’ Imam ‘Ali had been informed by the Prophet in detail throughout his life *how* he was going to die and when. Yet, if the majority of us knew we were going to suffer an injury tomorrow, it would block most of our energy from now until then in anticipation of the event.

A heart must be purified to reflect the light of the soul within. The key to this is knowledgeable abandonment and the test of it is contentment with the decree. When these conditions are fulfilled, one is in true faith and peace.

One day, Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib moved away from a leaning wall to another wall. People asked him:

'Do you run away from destiny?'

Whereupon he answered: 'I have run from Allah's destiny to Allah's decree.'

(When he got up, the wall fell.)

Destiny is experienced as the seal of decrees. We have reached the end when we have reached our destiny. So when Imam 'Ali said that he was running from destiny to the decree of God, he meant that God had decreed that he should avoid the leaning wall through giving him the faculty of reason and sight. He was moving along what God had decreed, for the decree on that occasion was for him to move.

It was said to the Commander of the Faithful:

'Shall we not guard you?'

Imam 'Ali replied:

'Every man's destiny is his guardian.'

Let us compare the two traditions. In one case, Imam 'Ali moved along towards what was decreed; in the other he was shown that it was decreed for him to remain where he was. It is a question of the degree of *yaqin* (certainty). *'Ilm al-yaqin* (knowledge of certainty) relates to theoretical knowledge such as the knowledge of pain, when one has an accident. *'Ayn al-yaqin* (eye of certainty) is the experiential aspect of this knowledge, the experiencing of pain, the witnessing of the Fire, the knowledge that the decree will occur. *Haqq al-yaqin* (truth of certainty) is the absolute truth of pain, of actually being in the Fire or being fully in total harmony with one's destiny.

The station of the Imam was that of *haqq al-yaqin* for being the manifestation of an unfolding destiny he simply enacted the decree. He was the voice of destiny, whereas a spiritually attuned person is only attempting to acquire *'Ilm al-yaqin*.

If one has managed to exclude everything else from the heart and is moving along by the 'two eyes of the heart' as described by Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, then one is running along the path of one's decree; for there is no longer any resistance. If, however, one is not in a state of continuous contentment, the discordant self within will continue to fan the

flames of agitation and disharmony.

It was said to Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib when he wanted to fight with those who came out against him:

'Would not it be better if you take care and be on your guard?'

Imam 'Ali declared:

'Which day should I run away from death? Is it the day which was not destined or is it the day of destiny? On the day that has not been destined I have no fear of anything else. And if it has been destined for me no amount of caution will be of good to me.'

It is related that once Imam Husayn ibn 'Ali met with Mu'awiyah. Mu'awiyah asked him:

'What has come upon your father that he fights the people of Basra?'

Mu'awiyah is referring to the Battle of Jamal when Sayyida 'A'isha went against Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Imam Husayn ibn 'Ali said:

'What made him do that is his knowledge that what will reach him will never miss him and what will miss him will never reach him.'

Man lives in time. He experiences destiny, which follows the decree, and interacts with it in time. During this process he sometimes thinks that both power and result emanate from him, until finally he concludes that, in reality, he is only a witness to the divine creation. The divine decree is for him to recognize the one Creator, by Whose grace he was brought about so that he might witness His perfect way. True witnessing of this perfection can only occur when the individual reaches a state of total submission and non-duality. When this state is perfected the individual personality melts with the total flow of events. The higher consciousness of what remains of him may then be exposed to future events.

The more the personality of the individual is assertive, the more the separation from Reality; the lower the spiritual state of the being, the more merciful it is that he does not know his destiny. However, for the person of total abandonment, who transcends the cage of time, present and future become one. God, then, allows these visions.

When Imam Husayn ibn 'Ali was leaving Mecca on the Day of Hajj 61 AH, rational advice was given to him that he was going to confront a great evil force. The Imam's reply to this counsel was: 'God has wished to see me martyred.' The Imam had the privilege of seeing his physical destiny, for his spirit and consciousness were at such a level that he could witness what would happen to his body with complete contentment and submission.

When people contemplate the greatness of his sacrifice, they are measuring it from their individual, egotistic, dual consciousness. The Imam, himself, would not have considered his death a sacrifice, because sacrifice entails someone who is sacrificing and a thing to be sacrificed. For him who sees only God and exists in that state of union, there is no giver, no taker, only the one Reality that transcends all of these; for such a being leaving this world is real liberation. He knows that death belongs only to the body and that his real self will move on to the next phase of eternal consciousness.

The Nature of Action

The following saying is related from Imam Husayn ibn 'Ali:

The Imam said:

'I heard my father, Imam 'Ali say: "Actions are according to three states – obligatory ones, virtuous ones, and disobediences. As for the obligatory ones, they are by the order of Allah, glory be to Him, by the contentment of Allah, by the destiny that Allah has decreed, and by the decree of Allah and His measures, and His will and by His knowledge.

As for the virtuous deeds, they are not by the order of Allah but they are by His contentment according to the judgment of Allah and the measure of Allah, and His will and by His knowledge.

As for the disobedient acts, they are not by the order of Allah. But they are according to the judgment of Allah and measure (decree) of Allah and His will and knowledge. And He punishes according to it."

Look at the fine distinction between the states. They all fall under the same category for they are by decree and by destiny, by will and by knowledge. The only difference is that there are those actions which

are absolute, emanating by the order of God, and there are those which are either virtuous or disobedient, and will be rewarded or punished accordingly.

Shaykh al-Saduq, who collected most of the traditions referred to in this book, quoting from another saying says:

‘Nothing happens in the heavens or earth unless there are seven elements in it – desire (*mashi’ah*), will (*iradah*), decree (*qadar*), destiny (*qada’*), the Book (*kitab*), the permission (*idhn*), the appointed time (*ajal*).’

Everything, including all the actions that emanate from a bondsman, is under these elements and if we deny this, we are removing some of the power of the control of God. He has given the bondsman his power to act, and to deny the fact that the bondsman has the ability to act is foolish. It is a denial of something that we all know – that man can act.

So if somebody acts, he has acted according to his will and his wish. After the will and the wish, there are destiny and decree, permission and the Book of God. Everything is within them.

As for the command of God and His prohibitions, they do not connect with the action of the bondsman in essence. All that connects with them is the agreement of the bondsman, or his disagreement regarding that command and prohibitions.

The degree of freedom that the bondsman has is his agreement or disagreement to follow the decree. This is all. The choice he has is whether he agrees to follow destiny or not. The more he is in that agreement, and in that contentment, the more he sees his destiny.

Imam Husayn ibn ‘Ali was content with his destiny, which was that he be martyred. His choice was his recognition of no choice. The freedom that we imagine is really to be freed of ourselves (*nafs*). Indeed the only freedom we have is to recognize completely the non-freedom, which then enables us to see the absolute freedom of the Absolute.

If we are intelligent we obey. If we are not, we are afflicted. The only choice we have is to learn how to unify our actions with our destinies. It is intelligence that gives us those boundaries, for nobody wants to suffer. If we go against our destiny we will suffer shock and disequilibrium instead of the smooth progress we all inherently desire.

However, if the self is to evolve to its full spiritual potential, surrender, purification and enlightenment are necessary stages in the journey. Some people undergo a great deal of hardship and afflictions, while for others the way is easier. Indeed there is a well-known tradition that says: 'It is out of God's love that some people are dragged to the Garden on bleeding knees.' It is also said that 'the Garden is surrounded by fires and the Fire is surrounded by gardens.' One knows how easy it is to be enticed into attractive pleasures and how difficult it is to leave them behind and regain equilibrium.

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib said:

'Everything in this world is ignorance except where knowledge occurs. And all of knowledge is evidence (against you) except what has been acted upon. And all action is vanity except that which is sincere. And sincerity is in danger until the bondsman is given respite with what is going to be his seal (end).'

We are as good as the way in which we end this existence. The condition at the point of departure from this world obviously bears more weight than the actions of earlier times. Therefore, the state of the person, as far as his sincerity and purity are concerned, at the last moments of his life, carries greater significance upon the station of his released soul in the next existence. In the same way, when a child is born into this world, he is marked physically and mentally more by the condition of his mother on the day of his birth, than by her state on any single day during the gestation period. The mother's condition at the child's birth marks the seal of his birth as his final actions denote the seal of his death.

It is related from Imam Hasan ibn 'Ali that he was asked about the Saying of Allah, the Exalted:

'And We have created everything according to a measure.'

The Imam said:

'He says, Allah, the Exalted, that we have created everything for the people of the Fire, according to their actions.'

Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. At the gross physical level, action and reaction are mathematically measurable. Every wrong action will bring about its equivalent in evil on the doer. This is a natural

law. However, evil and wrong-doing cannot always be fully quantified by us.

Since creation is based on goodness, good deeds are always related to increase, while bad actions generate an identical degree of negativity. This Saying shows us that the people of the Fire will be punished justly, according to the exact measure (content) of their wrongdoing.

Contentment with the Decree

Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib said:

‘I heard the Prophet say:

‘Allah, the Majestic, said: He, who is not content with My decree and does not believe in My destiny, let him seek a God other than Me.’

The Prophet also said:

‘None of you will believe unless he believes in the decree – its goodness and badness, its sweetness and bitterness.’

Human beings have the tendency to judge the patterns and laws of existence as good or bad according to the outcome of events. If we have acted erroneously, for example, and the laws have come upon us, we will consider them bitter; yet they are there whether we like it or not.

Iman (faith, trust, belief) is connected with trust. Trust can be unshakable, when it is founded on knowledge and therefore reliable. The word in Arabic also connects with peace and security, so it is through knowledge and reliability that we are secure. This state of belief or trust is not possible unless the believer gains the knowledge of the Cause behind all experiences of goodness and evil, sweetness and bitterness.

All of these opposites are recognized within us as a result of certain causes that interact with the individual and bring about these events. Indeed specific events can be desirable at one time but very undesirable under different circumstances. Self recognition of these mechanisms can only develop when insight has deepened and the situation is seen with the eye of unison. *Iman* is ultimately related to the unity between cause and effect, outer and inner, sweet and bitter, and all the other opposites.

This tradition related from Imam ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin. The Imam said:

'I went out until I came to this wall and leant against it, and there was a man wearing two white garments, looking at my face, and he said to me: "O 'Ali Ibn al-Husayn, what is the matter that I see you sad and depressed? Do you grieve of this world? The provisions of Allah are ready for the good and the evil."'"

I replied:

'It is not about this that I am sad but it is as you say.'

'Is your sadness about the hereafter? It is a true promise delivered by a compelling King.'

I replied:

'I am not sad about this, but it is as you say.'

'So what then is your sadness for?'

I said:

'I am fearful of the plot of Ibn Zubayr.'²

The man laughed and said:

"O 'Ali Ibn al-Husayn, have you seen a man who has been fearful of Allah and He had not saved him?"

I said: 'No.'

"Have you known a man who asked Allah, Glory be to Him, and was not given?"

Then I said: 'No.'

And then I looked and there was no one in front of me.'

This is an example of how the mind of even a fully sublimated and

² Abdullah ibn Zubayr was a son of one of the prominent companions of the Prophet and a representative of the old Makkan-Qurayshite hegemony. Ibn Zubayr took advantage of the Umayyad weakness after the death of Yazeed's son, Mu'awiya II, to proclaim his caliphate in 61 A.H./680-81 CE. By 64 A.H./684 CE. he had established power in Iraq, Southern Arabia and much of Syria. He was killed in battle against Hajjaj, the Umayyad Governor of Iraq in 73 A.H./692 CE. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin kept neutral during the struggle between Ibn Zubayr and the Umayyads but as the tradition shows was clearly apprehensive of the problems that might arise from this revolt.

surrendered being may get involved with the processes of the world. The reminder from the world of the unseen came to him to bring him back to the state of sublime contentment.

The Imam, even at the height of his worldly pre-occupation, would have no doubt about 'provisions'. His sadness was due to his concern for man's hypocrisy and his capacity for evil. He was afraid of the calamities that a man would bring on his fellow men through ignorance. Here again, the voice of Truth reminds the Master that so long as we are aware of the danger, and fear God, we are safe; whenever we truly ask God for guidance, we will be given it. Once the counsel of the voice had reached the heart of the Imam, it had served its purpose, so it disappeared.

It is related from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq that one day the Prophet laughed until his teeth showed, and he said:

'Do you not ask me what causes me to laugh?'

They said:

'Yes, O Prophet of Allah.'

He said:

'I am surprised with the Muslim, for there can be no decree that Allah makes upon him except the good end of his affairs.'

It is related from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq that Allah has revealed to the Prophet Musa:

'I did not create any creation more loved by me than My believing bondsman and I only afflict him for that which is good for him, and I restore to him what is good for him, and I am more knowledgeable in what makes right his affair. So let him be patient upon My afflictions, and let him be grateful for all that I bestow upon him. Let him be content with My decree. I will then write him amongst those who are confirmers (the near ones with me) if he acts according to what makes Me content and obeys My commands.'

All destinies occur because of a set of events unfolding and interacting in time. The true Muslim sees the perfection and the truth behind the destiny, which he is witnessing. As an individual he may have his expectations and disappointments but, if he is a believer in God's perfect way, he will know

based on his past experiences, that even if the first impact of the outcome is not agreeable, in the end it will be to his benefit.

When the mercy of God is perceived as an affliction the remedy lies in patience, trust and acceptance of the situation with contentment. If this happens, the likelihood of seeing the benefit of the situation will be stronger.

It is related from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir that the Prophet Musa said:

‘Oh my Lord, I am content with Your destiny; You cause the old ones to die and the young ones to continue to live.’

Then the All Majestic God said:

‘Oh Musa, Are you not content that I am the One that gives provisions and Who is the guarantor?’

The Prophet Musa said:

‘Yes, my Lord, You are the best of the guardians and the best of guarantors.’

Contentment with God’s decree is related to the knowledge and understanding of the perfect balance and interaction in the physical and non-physical world, which are in unity. The Prophet Musa sees the perfect relationship between cause and effect, the seen and unseen, and with that understanding he declares his complete dependency on God and his contentment with the Provider of all provisions, known and unknown.

Man’s *Rizq* (Provision)

It is related from Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq that a man came to him saying:

‘By my father and my mother, preach to me good counsel.’

The Imam said:

‘If Allah, the Exalted, has made Himself responsible for your provisions, why are you concerned? If your sustenance is already apportioned, why then greed? If accountability is true (just) what is collection for? And if replenishment (from Allah, the Exalted) is true, what is miserliness for? And if punishment from Allah, Glory be to Him, is fire, what is disobedience for? And if death is true, then what is pleasurable anticipation for? If all is truly exposed and

known to Allah why then deceive? And if Shaytan is your enemy then why be heedless? And if passage along the straight, thin, narrow path is true (on the Day of Reckoning), what is vanity for? And if everything is according to decree and destiny, why grieve? And if this world is being annihilated, why have security in it?

Rizq is what gives sustenance to the human being. On the physical level it nourishes and sustains the body; at the higher spiritual level it maintains the inner equilibrium, and confirms the certainty of the purpose of this life and the belief in the hereafter.

God's will and objective for His creation is for His created beings to have access to, and knowledge of, the highest possible state, which is the certainty of the hereafter. Access to this state, which is the final fruit of real surrender and submission, is available to a wide spectrum of people. It is not dependent on the degree or quality of their physical *rizq*.

A pious being with no material wealth and an emperor have the same potential access to this provision. Indeed, the less concern and involvement with material provision there is, the more likely there is to be energy for spiritual development. Insecurity concerning provision will only distract the seeker from the true knowledge and experience of faithful surrender with its joy of dependence on Reality. No one is deprived of access to spiritual knowledge, except the denier of the all-encompassing Mercy. The characteristics of ingratitude and denial shield and isolate the individual, creating a disconnected, egotistical being, wrapped in an arrogant cocoon of self-inflicted darkness.

Through insight, reasoning and discrimination, we may come to know that every event or movement occurs according to prescribed laws. Every outcome is, therefore, perfectly prescribed. Any personal dissatisfaction arises from our ignorance of all the factors involved. For the intelligent, sincere person these disappointments will turn into the recognition of assumptions and misplaced expectations.

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib has related that the Prophet said:

'O 'Ali, certainty is that you will not be agreeable to anyone who is incurring the wrath of Allah (or is against Allah). And that you do not glorify anyone for what Allah has brought to you, and seek not to fault anyone for what Allah has not brought to you;

for provision will not be brought by covetousness, nor will it be repelled by someone's spite or hate. For Allah, by His wisdom and grace, has made ease and joy in certainty and contentment. And Allah has made sorrow and distress in doubt and displeasure.

There is no poverty worse than ignorance, and no wealth more useful than reason. There is no loneliness more desperate than vanity; no evidence better than counsel; no reason better than acumen; no caution better than stopping at the bounds of what is forbidden; no account as good as goodness of character; no worship as good as reflection. And the pitfall of talk is lying; the pitfall of knowledge is forgetfulness; the pitfall of devotion is coolness; the pitfall of gracefulness is arrogance; the pitfall of courage is transgression; the pitfall of tolerance is putting someone under obligation to you; the pitfall of beauty is infatuation with yourself; and the pitfall of being a man of good standing is pride.'

The Source of all bounty or provision is the One and Only Creator. So, if an expected goodness has not come to us, it is because something has caused its blockage. This is again part of the laws of the Creator. Whatever happens is a proof of the workings of these laws. If there is any blame to be attached it is to the individual, who has misread or misapplied the laws.

The broad meaning of *rizq* is all those experiences which enable us to continue in our overall sustenance. At the lowest physical level it is food, and at the highest level, it is pure awareness and the true submission that leads to inner freedom. So provisions vary from whatever causes us physical well-being to mental harmony. They increase the individual's state of overall health in both the gross and subtle sense.

As far as creation is concerned, man is inherently programmed towards positive expectations of health, well-being, mental harmony and spiritual awareness with their resultant contentment and gratitude. No matter what circumstances the individual is in, it is theoretically feasible for him to attain a state which will make him appreciate creation in its entirety. This will, thereby, render him a true worshipper of his Creator. So the extent to which man is able to realize the provisions God has created for him is based more on his willingness to see and acknowledge, rather than on the extent of his covetousness or anxieties.

The Finality of God's Decree

It is related of the Prophet that he was heard to say:

‘Allah has measured all measures before He created the heavens and the earth by fifty thousand years.’

In the Arab culture a thousand does not necessarily imply a specific figure. In this particular context it means a very long time before creation unfolded, the essential programming was already apparent. The tradition indicates that the laws that govern how everything moves were made before the physical existence of what was to be subjected to them. The subtleties (*lata'if*) of the inner guiding principles or ‘programming’ were there before the actual robotic enactment. Indeed we can compare ourselves to robots, endowed with a facility that enables us to act within set bounds, and thereby test the laws of decree and destiny. This small amount of flexibility enables each of us to ascertain for himself, within that micro-scale, that the extent of our possibilities for action lie within the stream of decree and destiny, and not beyond it.

The limited experience of free will, our so-called freedom, is only for us to recognize the fact that there is no real or lasting freedom on the physical or mental planes. A balance between the seen and the unseen only takes place when intentions, actions and constant reference to the light of the soul are synchronized.

The Prophet was asked about the knowledge of Allah:

‘He knew and He wished; He willed and He measured; He decreed and He judged and began it. Then He made come forth what He had decreed. He judged right as what He had measured and measured (decreed) what He willed. So by His knowledge was His wish and by His wish was the will, and by His will was the measure and by His measure were the destinies (His judgments), and by His destinies was the finality. So knowledge was first, and His desire was second, and His will was third. The measure is upon destiny in order to finalize or seal it.’

God's knowledge of creation preceded the act of creation. Then came the love of the Creator; from that love emanates creation, which is sustained and destroyed according to measures and decree. Then came a

beginning and a process, and a destiny for what He had decreed and what He had willed. These are based on measures, and His desire was by His knowledge, and His will was by His desire, and His measures were by His will, and according to His measures is His decree, and according to His decree was the execution.

God's knowledge was followed by His desire and then His will. All measures apply to all His decrees by the process of executing that decree. Thus the process starts from the sublime and subtle knowledge and ends with the physical manifestation and interlinking material realities, and the laws that govern them in the causal chain.

The following tradition is found in Sahih Muslim in the section on Decree:

Someone came to the Prophet and said:

'O Prophet of Allah, show us our *din* (religion, life transaction) as though we have been created now. What are we to do today? Is it according to how the pen has dried up, or according to what Allah's *qadar* (measure) has been or is it according to what is going to come to us in future?'

The Prophet answered:

'It is according to what the pen has dried up with and according to what the measures will dictate (according to what the decree will dictate).'

The man said:

'And how do we act?'

The Prophet said:

'Act, for everything will flow (emanate) in ease for what it has been created for, and for everyone his actions will accordingly be.'

The Prophet said the pen has dried. The pattern of the universe is set and complete and will unfold according to the decree. This is the awesome foundation of the decree, yet at the same time we need to interact in life. We are told that everyone has been given the path of ease for which he has been created. This means that all of us in whatever situation we are in seek equilibrium and balance. It is decreed that we all seek that which

is conducive, and try to achieve a balance within our lives. Man is not forced by his Creator to be in line with the decree; instead he is given the opportunity to see his own destiny unfold within the framework of God's preordained decree. The limitations of human freedom are the door to realize God's absolute freedom and total governance.

The Prophet was asked:

'Are we in a situation in which the affair has been completed or in an affair that is being reviewed?'

The Prophet answered:

'We are in an affair that has been completed and we are in an affair that is being reviewed and revised constantly.'

As far as God is concerned the affair is finished with, because God is beyond time. Therefore, the Source of all creation is from non-time and in non-time the question of an action beginning and ending does not arise. Beginning and end only exist in the creational and physical realities, so it is only for us that there is a beginning and an end in a constantly reviewable situation.

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib said:

'Know for sure that Allah has not given to his bondsman even though he strives strongly and even though the ways of the bondsman are great and even though his struggling is increased so that he will overcome that which has been written for him in the wise decree, nor will he fall between the weak bondsman and the bondsman's inabilities to reach what has been decreed for him in the divine decree.

The Prophet is reported to have said:

'Know for sure that if the entire *Ummah* (community of believers) has gathered in order to benefit you by something, they cannot benefit you by anything unless Allah has written it for you; and if all of them have been collected to cause you an evil act they cannot cause you a loss or evil act except according to what has been written by Allah. The pens have been lifted and the ink is dry.'

Say: Nothing will afflict us save what Allah has ordained for us; He is our Patron and on Allah let the believers rely. (9:51)

If the final decree of God has been executed there is no way of overcoming it. Whatever entities have been created are under the influence of their natures, which may be guided or misguided. The selves are under the influences of the '*uqul*' (plural of '*aql*'). All the small individual '*uqul*' are under the original '*Aql*' (faculty of reason, intelligence, intellect) - the One God.

Another way of looking at this is to say that everything on this earth is under the heavenly influences, according to the decree of God. All the heavenly influences are under the *Malakut* (world of the unseen), and the *Malakut* is enslaved by the *Jabarut* (middle world between the physical world and the world of the unseen). The *Jabarut* is under the command of the *Jabbar* (The Compeller), Who is the enforcer for all His creation. Hence there is no possibility of any trace in existence except by His power. There is no doer save Him, and the entire earth is in His hands. The entire heavens are folded in His right hand, and the moon, the sun and the stars are all according to His command.

Surely I rely on Allah, my Lord and your Lord; there is no living creature but He holds it by its forelock... (11:56)

And Allah has created you and what you make. (37:96)

The Purpose of Creation

People came to Imam Hasan ibn 'Ali after the death of his father, Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, to pay him allegiance.

Imam Hasan said:

'Glory to be He Who has decreed His order and has selected those whom he preferred and has made His order to encompass it and has bestowed well-being. I glorify Him in a way that He can complete His bounty (delights) upon us, and thereby deserve His contentment.

This world is the abode of affliction and plots, and whatever is in it is in descent. Allah has informed us as to how we may heed it. He put forth to us His warnings so that there is no excuse for us after having been warned. So hold on to austerity with that which is being annihilated and have desire for that which will remain, and fear Allah in private and in public.

‘Ali, in his life and in his death and in his resurrection, lived according to the decree and died according to his destiny.

I accept your allegiance (promise) on condition that you are at peace with whomsoever I am at peace with, and you be against whomsoever I am against.’

They all paid allegiance to him.

In this tradition, the Imam glorifies the Source of all creation, and explains the function and purpose of man in this world; which is the growth of his faculty of discrimination so that, being warned, he seeks that which is permanent, taking continuous precaution against transgression.

Imam Hasan testifies that Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib lived in accordance with the decree, and in fulfilment of his destiny. He then accepts the allegiance of the people on the condition that they follow his judgments. This will save them from the turmoil and afflictions of this life, and give them the opportunity of true surrender and awakening to the high station that God has ordained for man.

The following Saying is reported by more than one Imam:

A man from the people of Iraq entered to Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, because he had been asked to come out and fight against Mu‘awiyah, and said:

‘Tell us about our coming out against the people of Syria, is it by Allah’s decree and destiny?’

Imam ‘Ali said to him:

‘Yes, old man. By Allah, you do not go up a hillock, nor do you go inside the valley, unless it is by decree and destiny from Allah.’

The man then said:

‘Then to Allah I account for my difficulties?’

The Imam said:

‘Slowly, old man; maybe you are thinking that destiny is inevitable and that decree is essential. If it was like that, chastisement and reward will be nullified; order, prohibition and admonishment would be meaningless; and the meaning of promise and threat will fall; and there will be no blame upon a man for his evil action or

any praise for one of good action. In fact, the one of good action is more blameworthy than the one who commits sins and the one who commits sins is more worthy of goodness than the one who commits good action. This is the saying of the worshippers of idols and enemies of the Merciful, and of the faction of the people who believe in pre-determination, and the Magians.'

It was already mentioned that decree and action are like soul and body. One cannot experience the soul unless one has a body. Body is one's action, while one's soul is the regulating source or decree. One cannot exist without the other. Decree is meaningless without action. So destiny is the outcome of one's action which follows decree.

If one's action has been selfless, or one of transformative worship and adoration, the outcome is perfection.

The Imam continued:

'O old man, Allah, the Exalted, has obligated with choice and prohibited with warning, and has given much upon little. And Allah will not be disobeyed in defeat, and He will not be obeyed forcibly.'

God has given his bondsmen the choice of either recognizing their slavehood or not. He does not like to be obeyed forcibly. His *Sunnah* (way, habitual custom, line of conduct used in reference to Allah or the Prophet Muhammad) is based on love, generosity and mercy. The animals are created without will, and they obey the laws of their nature. So why did God create this higher being man, with will, if it were not to give him the choice of recognizing His glory?

The Imam further continued:

'He did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them in vain. This is the imagination of those who deny. Woe to those who deny, from the Fire.'

The old man then got up and burst out into poetry:

'You are the Imam whom we hope to be able to ask on the Day of Salvation when we expect forgiveness from the Merciful. You have cleared for us in our *din* (life transaction, religion) what was perplexing. May your God reward you for all your goodness. We now have no excuse in committing any vice.'

According to another tradition, Imam 'Ali also told the man:

‘The affair (command) is from Allah and so is the judgment (destiny).’

Then the Imam recited the following verse from the Qur’an:

‘And serve Allah and do not associate any thing with Him and be good to your parents.’

(4:36)

Decree and Destiny, the Secret of God

An important tradition is related from Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, which contains the key to the full understanding of decree and destiny. This is diving into the sea that he cautioned earlier not to enter (without guidance).

‘For certainly decree is a secret of the secret of Allah, and a veil of Allah’s veil, a preserved sanctuary of Allah lifted up in the veil of Allah, folded up from the creation of Allah, sealed by the seal of Allah earlier on in the knowledge of Allah.

‘Allah has unburdened His slaves from its knowledge [the entire knowledge of the decree] and lifted it up beyond their witnessing and the extent of their comprehension, because they will not reach it by the knowledge of lordship, nor by the capability of everlastingness, nor by the might of illumination, nor by the power of unification, because it is a pure and abounding sea that is Allah’s. Its depth is what is between the heavens and the earth; its breadth engulfs what is between the east and the west. Black like the darkest night, full of serpents and reptiles, it rises sometimes and subsides at others. At the bottom of it there is a shining sun which no one is allowed to be exposed to except the One Solitary God, the One and Only. For he who dwells upon it and looks at it opposes Allah in His wisdom and competes with Him in His power. Lifting up His veil and revealing Allah’s secrets brings forth the anger of Allah and (whoever does this) his abode will be hell and the worst of outcomes.’

The ultimate truth or Divine knowledge, which is timeless, is shown here to be like an ocean wave, whose depth is the distance between the heavens and the earth, and whose breadth is between sunrise and sunset; for this infinite ocean of knowledge encompasses all experiences and all realities. When it is looked at through man’s vision, which is subject to the limitations of space and time, the dynamism of this ocean is so bewildering

that its true meaning will elude him, as the totality of this vast truth can only be grasped by God, the One Reality. Therefore, the more we examine rationally the more it becomes illusive. It can only be known by heart and soul, not through mind and intellect.

Thus the deeper we try to dive the more confused we become, unless we leave physics and embrace metaphysics. Intellectual knowledge of this phenomenon tends merely to bring out new issues, which further agitate the mind. The final solution comes when a unified state of experience arises. In this state the individual experiences an instantaneous and harmonized connection between all causes and effects, and lives within a unified field of beingness. He is then simultaneously aware of the ripples of the waves and the calm of the ocean below. When he was seeking the knowledge of decree and destiny he was affected by the waves, although he had some knowledge of the infinite ocean below. However, when he awakes to the unified state, he is both in the infinite non-changing ocean and the ever-changing waves at the same time. He acknowledges both and sees they are one.

Until the individual attains this state of union, the correct courtesy is to approach whatever situation in which he finds himself in a state of awareness and to surrender fully to the flow of events. Similarly, for the person who is exploring the shores of an ocean, the correct courtesy is for him to connect fully with the bounds of the ocean and its surface, until such time as the wave beckons him in. Then he will swim, explore and internalise more knowledge. For everything there is a time; a time to remain on the shore and a time to walk in the ocean. The real courtesy is to know the state one is in at each specific moment and be fully at one with that state. This is where head and heart are in unison.

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib says the heart experiences different states at different times. Sometimes it is open; during those times one can worship and concentrate on inner development. At other times it is closed and one restricts oneself to the basic duties. The key lies in contentment with whatever state one finds oneself in; for then one is submerged in the total ocean of submission.

Affliction, the Ultimate Remedy

Every human being goes through life experiencing a series of challenges and trials, some of which are considered attractive and good while others may appear difficult and unfortunate. The Prophetic revelation and Qur'an are based on the premise of one mysterious Reality that is ever constant and permeates every level of consciousness and perception. Trials and afflictions are therefore the divine natural forces that enable us to be purified from personal illusions and delusions and enable us to glimpse aspects of the light of the perfect Reality that is the *Nur* of Allah. No one is ever spared this gift. Indeed, our life is a journey from darkness to light.

In considering the role of 'affliction', or 'testing', in man's spiritual development, we shall first examine the basic meaning of the word *fitnah* (affliction), which comes from the verb *fatana*, to try, tempt, seduce, afflict, torment. The dictionary definition of *fitnah* is *temptation, trial, charm, enchantment, captivation, fascination, enticement, intrigue, sedition, riot, discord, dissension*.

Like all enticements *fitnah* brings with it agitation and torment. It implies a plot that may be recognizable. The possibility of recognition gives us the opportunity to escape from its negative consequences. Love of one's children, for example, is an inevitable affliction, but if one is aware of its universality this can lead to its acceptance.

There are at least ten discernible modes associated with affliction and we will use the Qur'an to help analyze the concomitant modes.

One common mode of its meaning is *to be at a loss, to be confused*:

They will cry out to them: Were we not with you? They shall say: Yea! but you caused yourselves to fall into temptation, and you waited and doubted, and vain desires deceived you till the threatened punishment of Allah came, while the arch-deceiver deceived you about Allah.

(57:14)

The second meaning is *test*:

...and We tried you with (a severe) testing...

(20:40)

Do men reckon that they will be left alone on saying we believe and not be tried (afflicted, tested)?

(29:2)

And most certainly We will try you until We have known those among you who exert themselves hard, and the patient, and made your case manifest.

(47:31)

God's plan for His bondsmen is for them to unify what they say with what they are. This means man is constantly being tested, as to be more aware of the connection between intention, attention and action.

The third mode associated with its meaning is *proof* or *connection*:

Then their excuse would be nothing but that they would say: By Allah, our Lord, we were not idolaters.

(6:23)

On the Day of Reckoning it will be clear to people that earthly dualities were the reason for their confusion and loss; for idolatry is the outcome of association with other than Oneness.

The fourth mode associated with the meaning of *fitnah* is association (*shirk*) - association in the sense of associating other beings with the transcendent Reality of God. In the following verse association is seen as the opposite of unity (*tawhid*). The universe and all of creation has emerged from One Source, which sustains life. Thus any distraction from that is a form of '*shirk*'.

And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from whence they drove you out, and persecution is worse (greater) than slaughter, and do not fight with them at the Sacred Mosque until they fight With you in it, but if they do fight you, then slay them. Such is the recompense of the unbelievers.³

(2:191)

³ The preceding verse clarifies that the Muslims should only respond to rather than instigate hostilities, for the concern of Muslims should be to affirm unity and harmony and avoid separation and division.

The fifth mode is *denial, covering up*:

...Surely into trial (temptation) have they already fallen, and truly hell encompasses the disbelievers.

(9:49)

The sixth mode relates to *persecution*:

Surely (as for) those who persecute the believing men and the believing women, then do not repent, they shall have the chastisement of hell, and they shall have the chastisement of burning.

(85:10)

The seventh mode is *agony, chastisement or distress*, as in these verses:

Taste your persecution! This is what you would hasten on.

(51:14)

...and as for him whose temptation Allah desires, you cannot control anything for him with Allah...

(5:41)

The eighth mode is *death (to sensory realities)*, which is illustrated by the following two verses:

... if you fear that those who disbelieve will cause you distress; surely the unbelievers are your open enemy.

(4:101)

But none believed in Musa except the offspring of his people, on account of the fear of Pharaoh, and his chiefs, lest he should persecute them...

(10:83)

The ninth mode is *reflection*:

And surely they had purposed to turn you away from that which We have revealed to you...

(17:73)

The tenth mode is *heavy distress*:

Our Lord! Do not make us a trial for those who disbelieve...

(60:5)

...O our Lord! Make us not subject to the persecution of the unjust people.

(10:85)

In other words, do not let those who are in a state of infidelity cause us distress. One deep cause of affliction or meaning of *fitnah* is love.

And know that your wealth and your children are a temptation...

(8:28)

Man loves wealth and offspring, thus affliction and love balance out. Anything other than love for God is a trial, only love for God's sake is liberation.

Once *fitnah* has set in and the disturbance has occurred, it can be considered as *bala'*. This word means: *trial, tribulation, affliction, distress, misfortune, calamity*. *Bala'* is from *ibtala'*, which means *to be tired of, wear out* – as in clothes that are threadbare. We are tried in order to recognize that all the accoutrements of life are of little value. It is Reality's way of making us wary of our desires and attachments.

Bala' is the bringing out to the light of experience that which is written for us according to the measure. God, by His power, has made afflictions the means by which our inner light - soul - will come forth, become visible, and act as a guide. We were created in order that we might reach our full potential – to become fully cognizant of the immutable soul. In this way affliction should not be seen as mere chastisement. This is reflected in the following verse:

What! Did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us?

(23:115)

The Prophets were subjected to terrible afflictions, as is shown by the following examples:

And certainly we tried Sulayman, and We put on his throne a (mere) body, so he turned (to Allah).

(38:34)

He said: So surely We have tried your people after you, and the Samiri has led them astray.

(20:85)

And Musa chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment; so when the earthquake overtook them, he said: My Lord, if You had chosen to do so, You could have destroyed them long before this, and me too, so will You now destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? It is naught but Thy trial, Thou makest err with it whom Thou pleasest and guidest whom Thou pleases...

(7:155)

Man's inherent tendency is to want only what is best because this is how the mercy and love of the Creator prevails. Hence our sufferings and difficulties should be viewed as assisting us along the path of spiritual progress by forcing us to give up everything that hinders our inner development.

The following verses show how God uses *bala'* as a means by which He tests His bondsmen:

And We will most certainly try you with somewhat of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits; and give good news to the patient.

(2:155)

...but if they turn back, then know that Allah desires to afflict them on account of some of their faults; and most surely many of the people are transgressors.

(5:49)

...of you were some who desired this world and of you were some who desired the hereafter; then He turned you away from them that He might try you...

(3:152)

Who created death and life that He may try you – which of you is best in deeds; and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving.

(67:2)

The interpretation of 'which of you is best in deeds' is which of you follows the light of intellect, discrimination and proper action.

All *fitnah*, and therefore *bala'*, come about according to a system of cause and effect. However, one can leave that system and be saved from

the *bala'*. At one level we are saved by the recognition of how the *finah* and the *bala'* arose, and at a much more effective level by severing from the cause of the difficulty.

An example of this is the *finah* of having a spouse or a friend who is given to repeated periods of unreliability and dishonesty. The initial recognition, that one has fallen into a relationship with a person who will continuously cause disruption to that expected unity, brings about a certain healing. The knowledge of the irreconcilability of the situation itself must bring relief, because love demands loyalty and reliability, whereas the erratic behavior of the spouse or friend cuts across all of these factors.

This recognition is half the solution. Full relief can only be obtained after a final or total separation is brought about. At first it was a *finah*, then there was the experience of *bala'*, so first half relief, then full relief.

If a dictator comes to power and rules unjustly, it is a *bala'* that is brought about by through the negligence of the citizens of that country. God has created these systems of *finah* and *bala'* so that those who stray from the narrow path of correct conduct will experience trials and tribulations.

Many of these afflictions are to varying degrees remediable, as the preceding examples illustrate. However, if we stray too far off course, a point will come when we will be unable to obtain relief from the *bala'* and the decree becomes irreversible at least for a time; for example, a dictator whose power has become so firmly entrenched that only his death will release his people from their torment. Once a car has skidded and left the road there is no chance of stopping the workings of the laws of gravity. Equally, a man threatening to jump from a roof can be persuaded against this course of action, until the time he actually jumps.

There are some afflictions that are not reversible, and these will leave their effect on one's whole system. The loss of any faculty in the body, for instance, will close that door of information and knowledge forever. The deaths of a friend, family member, or man of knowledge are irreparable losses. There may be compensating factors but compensation will not be specific.

There are other forms of afflictions, which are clearly man-made; if these are allowed they may ultimately result in calamities, and sometimes the collapse of a culture. It is important that we learn to differentiate between God's ways and situations where man's greed or other lower elements can temporarily veil His mercy. The Qur'an warns us of this:

And among men is he who says: We believe in Allah; but when he is persecuted in (the way of) Allah he thinks the persecution of men to be as the chastisement of Allah; and if there come assistance from your Lord, they would most certainly say: Surely we were with you. What! Is not Allah the best knower of what is in the breasts of mankind.

(29:10)

The question of commodity monopolies is a good example of this. If the price of a commodity is based totally upon its rarity or common availability, we can say that the cost, whether high or low, is directly attributable to the merciful Reality. We will then submit to the situation and be content with it. However, when this price is disturbed because of hoarding, dumping or other artificial means of control, it is clearly caused by man. There is a tradition in this respect:

He who brings forth what he needs will be well provided for and he who monopolizes is cursed.

If an individual or a group of people transgress and abuse natural laws, their actions will affect many others adversely. Unless the others stop these erroneous actions or move out of their sphere of influence, they too will be influenced and affected by these injustices. These afflictions that may beset innocent people are not a reflection of divine will per se, for divine Reality is just at all times. What we see here is limited injustice brought about by a person or a group, who were neither checked in time nor abandoned by the innocent ones. All of these human injustices are short-lived, however, for cities, nations, and indeed total cultures will eventually decay and collapse, unless they abide by the immutable, just ways of God.

When we consider the different types of affliction that may be suffered by seemingly innocent individuals or groups of people, we may find, for example, a child who was born blind. There may also be cases where men have acted with cruelty against women and children. Events like these often cause people to suspect divine injustice or an imbalance.

This suspicion is not correct for it is based on incomplete information. Our judgment is only subjective and very limited. Unless we put the small picture in its totality we will only be judging an event in isolation. Even natural catastrophes are part of a greater network of cause and effect, which, if viewed with a wider scope of understanding, will be seen to

be just. A handicapped child will cause his parents anxiety and hardship but a deeper understanding of the situation may reveal that constriction and trouble has sharpened the parents' sensitivity and awareness of subtler realities.

It is not possible to judge an event correctly when it is viewed over a short period of time. Many a door closes in one's face that, in the light of further experience and wisdom, will be seen as only the opening of new horizons. Equally acts of seeming injustice, when looked at from the wider time perspective, will fit into the overall picture.

At no time can we claim to have that overall vision which would enable us to relate all causes with their effects, for the systems and elements in existence connect with the world of unseen energies and subtler manifestations. Our insight and vision can only at best unravel a minute thread of the interrelatedness of cause and effect in this multi-dimensional web of existence. We are like small bats, only able to chart and recognize a limited route in the endless cavern of the existential womb.

The role of affliction in man's spiritual growth is revealed in the following extract from a divinely revealed tradition:

And there are amongst My believing bondsmen those whose belief will not be improved except by poverty and if I enrich them it will be ruined. And there are amongst My believing bondsmen those whose belief will not be improved except by enriching them and if I impoverish them it will spoil that. And there are amongst My believing bondsmen those whose belief will not be improved except by sickness and if I made their bodies healthy it would have corrupted them. And there are amongst My believing bondsmen those whose belief will not improve except by good health and if I give them sickness it will cause them corruption. And I organize (manage the affairs) by My knowledge of what is in their heart for I am the All Knower.

The way that man is goaded and guided along his experiential life is according to what is most conducive for his spiritual development. In his ignorance, he may see events as being either constrictive or expansive. Yet, whatever form manifests will be the most appropriate for that individual's inner evolverment. The believing person will always recognize this.

Selected Topics Related to Decree and Destiny

Introduction

The preceding chapters were based on Qur'an and the Prophetic teachings, so that we reflect upon Allah's ways and increase in understanding. When we suffer we often question God's mercy, blame others or bad luck. These attitudes are incorrect, although appealing to the ignorant.

There is always a tendency to blame an outside agency and to fail to realize that all creations are intertwined and the outside and inside reflect and influence each other. We can only discern Reality's perfection if we recognize our own wrong perceptions. These are often caused by the fears and darkness of the lower self, arrogance, wrong expectations, lack of higher reference and guidance.

The following issues and topics will be discussed in order to show that whatever is in existence emanates from a Source that is not subject to the changes and links in existence. This Cause or Source is the divine mystery or Allah's light.

Determinism

Every aspect of creation, known or not known, is subject to a predetermined pattern .i.e. to laws and regulations that build up to a climax until the point when the aspect in question, be it a human form or a planetary cosmos, is recycled.

The human soul is brought about in conjunction with the physical form of the body and its faculties of discrimination. When the body is discarded at the point of death, the soul carries on into the non-time zone –i.e. forever. The manifestations of all these entities stem from a Reality that is beyond time. Yet we as individuals experience everything in this existence *in time*. Our experiences in this world have unfolded in an interactional manner between our wills and desires, and the world around us. Therefore we have always had some free will and have been a party to our destiny.

However, from the point of view of the Creator of all, Who is beyond time, the meaning of everything that occurs *in time* is predetermined and pre-known. The Creator's laws are going to unfold in an interactional manner and the result will only be known to us as we interact with them. So it is not really relevant to us as we journey through this life that God, Who is beyond time, knows the final outcome of our actions in the absolute sense. Actions which are for us still unfolding in time will be appropriately punished or rewarded according to the extent of our compliance with the universal laws.

The creational laws are referred to in the following verse:

No evil befalls on the earth nor in your own souls, but it is in a book before We bring it into existence; surely that is easy for Allah.
(57:22)

The reference to 'in a book' is not meant in a fatalistic sense but from the angle of cause and effect and connectedness. Every evil like any other occurrence has a cause. Like all other causes and effects it has a beginning and an end and it is subject to the laws that govern it. These laws are in the creational book.

The predetermined knowledge of God is referred to in this verse:

And with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures – none knows them but He; and He knows what is in the land and the sea; and there falls not a leaf but He knows it; nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear book.
(6:59)

When the time is ripe, the leaf will dry up and the molecules separate. The knowledge of this is in the chromosomes, programmed inherently in the tree. It is this knowledge that is with God. God does not sit with a telescope saying: 'Now I am going to let this leaf fall.' Nor, equally, does He say: 'I am going to afflict that fellow, he deserves it.' God is beyond time. You and I are in time. It is important for us to feel the existential dynamism of this world, so we do not exceed the limits and over-reach ourselves. Afflictions are only the mercy of nature teaching us how to obey the rules of life.

The 'clear book' is not the pages of the physical Qur'an in our hands. It is the Book of Reality. The Qur'an is a description and a manifestation of the

Book of Reality. All manifest things are encompassed by the One and Only Reality. Everything is written in the book of *non-time* to be experienced *in* time. There is only God, and wherever one turns is the face of God.

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib has said: 'You are the evident book', meaning whatever you can experience is according to the Book of Existence. If you have acted in harmony with the laws and measures of the decree, your destiny will be contentment. If you have moved in a confused direction, you may also experience the mercy of God through your afflictions. Whenever trouble afflicts you, a specific door will be closed to you, so that you will be forced to move to where there is an opening. This is not to punish you. It is God's natural way to guide His creation to realize His perfections at all situations, irrespective of personal wishes or desires.

Certainty and Change

There are certain laws that are not possible to change. We cannot, for example, change the inevitability of death; for with every birth comes an eventual death. We may be able to delay death but only within the limits and bounds of the laws that govern nature.

If the temperature drops below thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit, water will freeze. We cannot change the natural phenomenon of freezing, but we can bring that ice indoors and melt it, or increase the atmospheric pressure upon water and thereby reduce the temperature at which it freezes. This example illustrates that, although we cannot negate or escape Reality's laws, we can work within them.

A wise father, who realizes the pugnacious nature of his son, knows that he cannot change his temperament. He can, however, put his combative nature to good use by encouraging him to fight evil for the sake of humanity; otherwise, the son's aggression will manifest indiscriminately.

From God's standpoint everything is certain. Everything is in the Book of Destiny. The greater the man's ignorance, the more he will believe he can change the ultimate outcome. The closer we move to the knowledge of Reality, the more we know that everything follows towards its destiny. The less freedom we have, the less choice there is. The closer we are to certainty, the less there is change.

Movements and change are existential and superficial. Certainty is absolute and concerned with Reality. Change has to do with divine laws (*shari'ah*), certainty with Reality (*haqiqah*). According to *shari'ah* man is accountable

and must constantly strive to change for the better. This is the meaning of moving from one decree to another. This is change within bounds.

When we strive to improve our destiny we must face the limits of freedom and interact with it to the best of our ability, realistically and rationally rather than emotionally.

Certainty and change are two facets emanating from one Source. We cannot experience one without the other. We cannot experience time, which is change, unless there is an understanding of timelessness. Change is within certainty. Its boundary is certainty and eventually it will reach a point of certainty.

The following verse illustrates how the foundation of certainty and change is from one Source:

And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way.

(2:186)

Reality - the cause of both the fixed and unfixed, of certainty and change, and the access to it - is within us. All realities have occurred and are energized because of the universally Real – that ultimate Reality is not subject to change and is ever eternal and permeates all. Every reality indicates its origin and source. Knowledge and wisdom on this earth implies unifying with this process. This is the meaning of ‘Call for God, ask for God’.

We notice that differences and conflict are natural in creation. On the one hand life is experienced in dynamic flux, yet we as human beings constantly look for stability. This apparent conflict can only be resolved according to what has already been described. The body and the physical world are in change and uncertainty, yet our soul or spirit is, in essence, of a certain and unchanging nature. If we look within, we reach the fundamental abode of total security and timeless certainty – a divine attribute. The more we look outwardly, the more we are insecure; for certainty cannot exist in the outer world except in dynamic flux.

There is certainty in the decree that we will die, and yet the length of our lifetime is often dependent on whether we abuse our system or not. If we transgress the bounds of good health, through ignorance, we will shorten our life span.

It is recorded in al-Majlisi's *Bihar al-Amwar*, Volume V, that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq has said:

'Those who die because of their sins (transgressions) are more than those who die because of their destiny. And those who live because of their goodly actions are more than those who have lived because of their allotted life.'

The Source of all goodness and mercy is eternal and ever there, therefore, any goodness or acts of kindness and generosity encourage longevity. As a result people who are happier, more cheerful and generous tend to live longer than those who are pessimistic and aggressive. History shows that people who have acted with selfless devotion and service often seem to have lived to a greater age than those who have not. Equally an improvement in the state of a patient may take place due to acceptance of their condition and good expectations. These factors can sometimes overcome hereditary tendencies and previous unhealthy lifestyles.

The question of the possible postponement of a destiny, such as death, is explained in the following divinely revealed tradition:

'Whoever belittles one of My lovers (saints) is challenging Me in a battle and I am never so hesitant in anything I do as when I hesitate in taking the life of a *mu'min* (believer), and I hate to cause him what he thinks is against him, but it is unavoidable.'

Through this and similar traditions we learn the meaning behind the reference to the 'hesitancy' of God in relation to the death of His believing bondsmen. One of God's attributes is the Eternal or the Everlasting and the believer, who adores God and His attributes, loves eternity. Life on this planet is not eternal but its end gives the impression of a breakdown of a desirable eternal state. The so-called 'hesitancy' of God to take the life of the believer merely reflects the believer's probable reluctance to leave the known, and go through the state of transformative confusion that will follow death.

Destiny is the experienced outcome of events; in the case of life, man's destiny is death. There is an average term of life which varies according to inherited physical traits, as well as natural environmental situations. In addition to these factors the person himself can play a crucial part in shortening or prolonging the allotted term because he is an integral part of the final outcome.

The knowledge of God, the Exalted, encompasses all acts and experiences all happenings, for He is beyond time. Thus the allotted term of a man's life is only known to God; so far as the individual is concerned it will only be known when it occurs.

Cause and Effect

Consider a man who has created a playground, and allowed people the freedom to play in it. A variety of outcomes will arise from their activities. The specific activities of the players are not determined; the causes and effects that govern this playground are. It is not determined, for example, that a man riding a swing will fall and break his neck. What is determined is what will occur if he swings too high – that he will lose his balance, slip off the swing and fall. We have freedom to decide whether we use swings and the manner in which we interact with them. The knowledge that is with God is the knowledge of the laws that govern these swings. These laws are perpetual. It is we who are transitory, moving in and out of the swings of the amusement park of life.

If we look at everything in this existence from the point of view that they are under the knowledge of God, by the knowledge of God, according to the laws of God, then everything that exists is under the decree of God, including human existence. However, if we regard everything from the viewpoint of limitation – that is, according to time and place – the situation is then somewhat different. It is also according to the decree but we are part of the decree. It is here that cause and effect come into play, in the realm of spontaneous interaction, where we can both be the cause of an event and affected by its effect. It is in this arena of 'personality' that we have 'affliction' and the lack of it. It is in the interaction between cause and effect that we taste the Fire and the Garden. One cause gives birth to an effect and that effect gives birth to another cause. We interact with this in a tangential manner. This is the process of the upbringing, through which man achieves his potential.

Thus, cause and effect are the ways the Creator brings us up to our full potential of complete abandonment and transformative submission– so that we may move with the knowledge in the now, not in the experiential knowledge of yesterday or tomorrow. Although, these too are important, for today is the child of yesterday and tomorrow is the outcome of today's intentions and actions.

The sensitive observation of the interaction of cause and effect and its impact on people, brings about wisdom and maturity. However, we are not always in a state of faith; and we are given the opportunity of committing the same errors again and again, until we either learn from them or go in ignorance to our graves.

In this causal chain of multitudinous, superimposed events, the destiny of the individual is affected by others. If, for example, the majority of the population abuses the environment, the land will become barren, regardless of whether we are in prayer day and night or not. If we have abused nature through excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, no matter how well-meaning and good-hearted we are, a time will come when we will starve because of our abuse of the land. Equally if we have wisdom, like the Prophet Nuh (Noah), a time will come when we realize that all of our warnings are not going to change society and affliction will come to it through its own deeds. So the Prophet Nuh built his ark and sailed away on it to safety, avoiding the inevitable natural calamities.

However, most of us believe that the afflictions that come to us through man's acts of injustice are the afflictions of God. This is our stupidity. Everything is from God, therefore overall punishment as such is a creation of God, but injustice is what we bring about by our doing. Man can punish in revenge and anger. We should not confuse this with divine punishment.

From an existential or humanistic point of view, therefore, we cannot separate the material from the moral. We cannot totally separate somebody else's actions from our action, and from the situation we find ourselves in. We cannot fully separate our home from that of our neighbour, our family from society. They are all interconnected, and they will all affect each other. There is no escape. The only difference is the extent of this effect and its influence.

Choice within Bounds

The More the Knowledge, the Less the Appropriate Choice

The ultimate freedom is that of no-choice. If we are aware of and consider every factor of a given situation, we would discover there to be only one optimum (most efficient) way in which we could act; although the momentary consequences of this action might not seem desirable at the time.

Take, for example, the question of choosing a career. A person has many desires, strengths and limitations as well as dislikes. If all of these factors are known, an order of hierarchy will emerge. Then this model will be matched with the situation in the world at large. If all of this has been logically pursued and no factors are left out, the best career path will emerge, leaving no room for further choice. The more confused we are about the different variables that enter this model, the more supposed choices we will end up with. However, the more clearly the objectives are defined and the parameters and variables are known, the less will be the choice of the course of action open to us.

Freedom within the Decree

The following verses indicate that we have a measure of freedom to act within the decree. Indeed, if we move along the decree within its laws, we will see their perfection and nothing will afflict us.

Whoever desires this present life, We hasten to him therein what We please for whomsoever We desire, then We assign to him the hell; he shall enter it despised, driven away.

And whoever desires the hereafter and strives for it as he ought to strive and he is a believer; (as for) these, their striving shall surely be accepted.

All do We aid – these as well as those – out of the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined.

(17:18-20)

And Allah sets forth a parable: (Consider) a town safe and secure to which its means of subsistence come in abundance from every quarter; but it became ungrateful for Allah's favors, therefore Allah made it taste the utmost degree of hunger and fear because of what they wrought.

(16:112)

...and it did not beseem Allah that He should be unjust to them, but they were unjust to their own souls.

(29:40)

Whoever does good, it is for his own soul, and whoever does evil, it is against it; and your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants.

(41:46)

My word shall not be changed, nor am I in the least unjust to the servants.

(50:29)

Surely we have shown him the way (the real way is clear); he may be thankful or unthankful.

(76:3)

One meaning of the last verse is that the way or path of freedom is laid out for us but, if we close our eyes, we do not see it. If we are attached or enslaved to something else, we cannot see that the freedom is within us.

The Importance of Gratitude

We enter into the path of freedom through the gate of gratitude. Gratitude renders the heart empty and clear. When we are in a state of thankfulness, there is no attachment at that moment, because the heart has already detached itself from whatever it was connected to, by the fact of that gratitude. This is the way of freedom. If we deny this, we will remain enslaved by one self-inflicted attachment after another.

And when your Lord made it known: If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more, and if you are ungrateful, My chastisement is truly severe.

(14:7)

This verse means that the growth of faith and certainty will enable the individual to see more directly the cause of every event. He will then see nothing other than the manifestation of the all connecting fiber of Reality, with subtle and gross multi-dimensional layers interacting upon each other in dynamic flux.

Man's Interaction with the Decree

Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste of that which they have done, so that they may return.

(30:41)

The laws that govern the existence of this world are neutral in that fire will burn a good man, if he plunges his hand in it, in the same way it will burn an evil man. It is through our deeds that we make these laws benign and healthy, or corrupt and deranged. God has given us the potential to see how our actions are manifested in this world, either positively or negatively. This is the meaning of the Garden or the Fire. So we choose the entry, and we forge the key to heaven or hell experientially here and now, by what we do. We have both options. As Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi said: 'When the veil is lifted, it will be seen that a man sends himself to the Garden or sends himself to the Fire.'

Whoever desires the gain of the hereafter, We will give him more of that gain; and whoever desires the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the hereafter he has no portion.

(42:20)

We cannot have total gratification within the physical and biological bounds in this world, for there is a limit to our abilities and lifespan. We cannot simultaneously pursue the short-lived pleasures of this world and those of the next, because there is only one heart. '*God has not put in the breast of man more than one heart,*'⁴ We will get what we pursue, for we are not separate from the total Reality.

Knowledge of the Limits

The verse quoted in the last section describes how the degree of our freedom lies within set bounds. Freedom is defined as how we confront these limitations. Our body has certain limitations as far as physical and intellectual achievement is concerned, for example. There is a limit as to how much we can sleep, eat or walk. All systems function within limits and these limits are the safeguards of creation against the disruptions and ignorance of man.

Creation is given the opportunity to participate in learning about the systems that govern existence, adopting and adhering to natural laws and patterns. The quicker we apply these laws consciously, the smoother will be our integration and the deeper our knowledge of the unifying factors.

⁴ Qur'an 33:4

We are created in order to respect these limitations and appreciate their wisdom and value. We are given an insight through them into the limitless Reality from which these limits have emanated. Access to the limitlessness of the King and His infinite chamber comes only after we have travelled through the narrow corridors of the palace, waited contentedly and with courtesy in the antechambers (respecting the limits) for permission to enter His presence. The King was always there and in full control but we did not know it.

Only when we acknowledge this fact and relate it to our limited sphere will we begin to comprehend something of the Limitless; for the Creator has given us a certain degree of freedom within these limits in order that we may be trained through controlled participation in His perfect creational plan.

It has been said earlier in this book that there are certain situations whose outcome is determined. It is determined, for example, that whatever lives will die eventually. All the laws of Reality, such as gravity, electromagnetism, thermodynamics etc., are determined. Then there are others unbeknown to us. Equally it is determined that we desire peace. Every human being loves peace; even those who enjoy noise would soon crave peace and rest were they to be subjected to loud music for a prolonged period of time.

Certain situations may come about that have, according to the laws that govern them, become so non-conducive to our well-being that we abandon them. We can leave a piece of land that has been abused, and move into virgin ground. The generosity of nature is such that we can do this again and again until finally a limit is reached, when destruction on a mass scale has begun to take place.

Man's Choice

The choice that is given to man is limited. Our actions will naturally influence the outcome. What is determined is that certain actions will bring about certain results, but the overall outcome is beyond human knowledge.

If man had not been given some margin of choice, he would not have had the possibility of being able to rise in consciousness. We, as humans, have consciousness and are subject to temptation and affliction, so we have to act. This is the meaning of 'choice within bounds'.

Disappointment or Punishment, an Indicator of Wrong or Inappropriate Action

The question of punishment is referred to in the following verse:

Say, 'God, holder of all control, You give control to whoever You will and remove it from whoever You will; You elevate whoever You will and humble whoever You will. All that is good lies in your hand: You have power over everything.

(3:26)

It is not determined for us beforehand that a person is going to be humiliated or debased. If the person puts himself in a position that brings about abasement, the resulting humiliation is bound to come to him. However, everything ultimately is caused by the Power that has brought about this creation and all its laws.

...Say: All is from Allah...

(4:78)

The next verse explains how we have choice, yet at the same time we are bound:

And as to Thamud, We showed them the right way, but they chose error above guidance, so there overtook them the scourge of an abasing chastisement for what they earned.

(41:17)

Everybody has the potential to be guided because we all contain the soul within us but, if we refuse to abandon our egos, we will blame someone else and carry on in a state of confusion. God will not change the bounds that He has set for His creation; those living within the bounds must first change themselves.

This is because Allah has never changed a favor which He has conferred upon a people until they change their own condition; and because Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

(8:53)

Change does not necessarily come about by our cognition of the need for it; action must also take place. A man who had previously been mean can become generous; as a result his existential situation may even be increased, because people who are generous often attract wealth.

The Freedom of No Choice

The so-called freedom of choice is based on confusion and is a result of not knowing our objective and the parameters involved. If we knew these there would only be one choice.

The ultimate choice of a path is one which does not confuse us with too many choices. This will free us from the possibility of mistakes and missing out on selecting the optimum choice.

When individualized and egotistic choice has been abandoned, the best choice will be selected and there will be continuous, harmonious flow.

Collective Destiny

Destiny for an individual is his interaction with the decree and experience of the outcome of it. The same applies to individuals who have links with each other such as a family, a tribe, a nation and humanity at large. The stronger the connection between people, the more obvious is their collective destiny.

In the same way that an individual will live out ultimately his final destiny (death and hereafter) so will all the members of a group or nation, who have common bonds amongst themselves. The collective destiny of a society or a community is the outcome of the interaction of its people's will with the decree. The gap between an individual destiny and a collective destiny is only as wide as the separation between the direction of the individual and the direction of the collective.

In the case of the Prophet Nuh, he lived amongst transgressors whose long term wrong actions blinded them to major natural phenomena, such as earthquakes and floods. The Prophet Nuh exhorted his people to reverse the course of their behavior in the hope of averting these disasters. When he realized that their will was to continue in their old patterns, thus sealing the inevitability of the catastrophe, he constructed the Ark. This enabled him to be saved and escape the collective doom.

The Prophet Muhammad was a man of abandonment and submission, who maintained his state of inner contentment despite the outer turmoil that may surrounded him. Confirmed in his state of inner certainty, he would not have been upset about the outcome of events. However, as a human being he would have maintained some concern about his body because this is the law of physical reality. Even if he was inwardly in a

higher state. he was still responsible to a degree for his body and had to act as a guardian upon it.

The Prophet's real contentment lay in the recognition of the perfect beauty of the laws of the Creator as they related to himself and the people around him. These laws will never change.

The entire creation stems from one Creator and is moving along a direction in time; hence there is interdependency among all elements of this creational fiber. Every individual will affect the collective will to varying degrees of intensity, although the impact may be so minute or subtle that we are unaware of its significance. This is the meaning behind the saying that the influence of an awakened soul is cosmic. The reverse is also true to a limited extent. One rotten apple can eventually spoil the entire basket.

The individual can choose, within certain bounds, to rise higher than the angels or sink to the lowest depths. This is the same choice that faces societies or nations as groups. Whoever is within a particular society or nation will be affected by the behavior of the majority.

The ignorant person tries to save himself by minimizing his exposure to undesirable outer events. The man of knowledge will translate his desire for safety and well-being into positive action in order to influence the others towards knowledge, and thereby correct their behavior. This path may appear more arduous but it is the only path. The man of knowledge sees only one Cause and one underlying Foundation for all existence. Thus, he sees no escape from fulfilling the cause of his existence, which is to know his Creator, adore, praise and worship Him.

In the case of the Prophet Musa, the wrong actions of his people resulted in numerous catastrophes which afflicted both the Prophet and his people.

During the Battle of Uhud the Prophet Muhammad suffered severe wounds due to the disobedience of some of his followers. His counsel from the beginning had been that the battle was not to be fought from outside the town. However, his followers were over-confident, remembering their success at the earlier battle, in which they had overcome an enemy who had been superior both in equipment and in number. The Prophet finally conceded to the wish of the majority on the condition that they did not abandon their position in the field. He planned the distribution of the forces but, as soon as there was a break in the enemy rank, the flanks of the

Muslims disintegrated. Some people ran after the booty believing, because of their expectations, that an easy victory had been achieved.

The Prophet was well aware of his people's weaknesses both in terms of spiritual stamina and adherence to discipline. He was aware that this lesson would ultimately be of benefit but at the same time it nearly spelled disaster. He himself was instrumental in teaching them the lesson, because he was badly wounded. In this case the teacher was the blackboard upon which the story was written with blood and arrows.

Revealed and Acquired Knowledge

Facts and information are realities whose relevance and importance change from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. If a man is pursuing a commercial enterprise, for example, he may have the information that there is need for a specific commodity in a certain town. This knowledge is significant and crucial to the achievement of his objective. If, however, he has no business involvement with that commodity or that town, the fact is of little use. Hence facts are as good as their usefulness. This usability is as good as the network of knowledge of the person who uses them.

As a person grows in knowledge through experience, that knowledge becomes like a net in which he catches the information which impinges on it. These facts and information impinge on multi-dimensional nets, which are based on the past experiences stored in his mind. As each specific input touches his mind, it will activate a certain part of that net.

These personally acquired aspects of knowledge have their relevance and priorities according to circumstances. While a man is trying to find a path through a wood, for example, the knowledge of the money market is of no use to him. Equally an innate system of priority knowledge will enable him to identify what information should be used at what time. He is swimming because he knows the exercise is beneficial to his body, when suddenly he receives a message that his child has been badly hurt in the house. He jumps out of the pool and runs in to help the child. The child's need takes precedence over the potential physical benefits of exercise.

We assimilate facts and information into a network of knowledge, which is based on our experiences, and we act accordingly. This human storage of existential facts is cumulative and spills from one culture to another.

However, prophetic or revealed knowledge contains the fundamental laws upon which creation is based. These principles never change and are not subject to time or place, as is the case with factual knowledge. Prophetic knowledge is primal and constant. It is, therefore, of the greatest value. When all outside information and facts are sorted out using the yardstick of this knowledge, reliable and desirable outcomes will ensue. Growth and increase in this knowledge is real enrichment, whereas the growth and increase in information and facts without this network of unchangeable knowledge is of little value and can be confusing. We understand this revealed knowledge once we have been exposed to it because we all share in higher consciousness.

Fear is an integral part of man's nature. At the lowest level he is afraid of hunger or the elements. He may fear deprivation at body, mind or heart levels. Some Prophets had feared being cut off from revealed knowledge.

Individual knowledge is based on facts and events that we are exposed to in different circumstances and situations. Revealed knowledge, transmitted by the Prophets, tells us the purpose of our creation and gives us a clear direction through which we may evolve spiritually. We may indeed stumble across some of the revealed knowledge but it will only be by trial and error unless we learn these eternal truths from the Prophets.

It is through human experience that we acquire technological or scientific knowledge, which have far more to do with the physical realities. Unless made subservient to revealed knowledge, these acquired technologies can also be destructive. However, if they are taken as secondary and subservient to the Prophetic knowledge, they can assist man in his journey towards self-knowledge. Modern technology is only valuable if it enables us to have more time for reflection and study, but generally in today's material society it merely becomes an end in itself.

The physical knowledge we have gathered will not necessarily help us to enhance our spiritual knowledge. Scientific and technological knowledge is generally material and to do with the physical world, while revealed knowledge relates to metaphysics and its emphasis is more on the inward, the spiritual and the lasting. Man will never be satisfied unless the material is balanced with the spiritual.

Both types of knowledge have their specific courtesies. A selfish, acquisitive person can pursue scientific knowledge with success because

it does not require the constant self-purification necessary for the seeker of spiritual knowledge. The spiritual seeker progresses along the path of inner knowledge to unlock and reach closer to the source of inner light within him. In this search he becomes the laboratory, the mosque or the monastery; whereas the seeker of outer technology needs a physical laboratory for his experiments.

The pursuit of material or scientific knowledge tends to enhance individualism and the ego. Generally the scientist becomes the center of his universe in the discovery and use of these laws; while spiritual knowledge demands that the seeker surrenders into it. The meaning of Islam is 'to surrender'. Once that happens there is a resonance that reverberates within the heart which echoes the mystery of life and the infinite perfections and mercy in every situation. One's awakening to higher consciousness is sometimes reflected in the face and in one's behavior. Inner knowledge is transformative, while mechanistic knowledge can only be measured in terms of prizes and publications. The former lies within the person, the latter outside of him.

Acquired knowledge is intellectual and functions at a more basic level. However, when a scientist is at the point of making a great discovery or breakthrough, he comes close to the edge of spiritual knowledge as he steps towards the ocean of the unknown. Einstein described his career: 'I feel like a child on the shore of the ocean, playing with the pebbles of the ocean of knowledge.' Many of the early scientists were monks, living an ascetic life. Mendel, the founder of modern genetics, is an example of this.

Outer and inner technologies are not incompatible. Indeed man begins his journey by seeking outer knowledge. We are programmed to acquire appropriate clothing, shelter and food, all of which need outer technology, but as we move up the hierarchy of consciousness and fulfillment of needs we reach the point of needing inner technology.

We desire health and well-beingness as a foundation for feeling good and happiness; we want health and equilibrium in our body so that we transcend body consciousness. Yet, we tend to ignore our bodies and health until we are conscious of an imbalance. Thus the use of outer technology and attention is a first step towards inner technology.

The Law of Opposites

The original Adamic creation began in the perfect Garden of Paradise. In that Garden all desires were instantly fulfilled. However, there was no awareness of consciousness and its levels or any distinction between good and bad. God wanted to reveal the fundamental issue of the opposites on which existence is based; for everything in life is experienced in a duality that is constantly moving from increase to decrease, strength to weakness, happiness to sadness, life to death, to give a few examples. So we are placed on earth in order to experience these opposites; yet in every situation that faces us we naturally veer towards one direction and avoid the other.

All of our behavior patterns are based on this push-pull mechanism. All of us will wish to interact with that which causes equilibrium and thereby contentment, and repel what causes disequilibrium and thereby discontentment. This mechanism exists on both the physical and mental levels. We love ease and comfort but dislike unpleasant conditions and difficulties.

Man, like all other creations, contains the vegetative self, which is concerned with sustenance, growth and reproduction. He also contains the animal self, with its added dimensions of mobility and the ability to react. Man is distinguished from the animal self by his faculty of reasoning and intellect, from which emanates that deeper guideline we call conscience. Thus man constantly seeks that which is conducive to his state of well-being and equilibrium and avoids destruction, confusion and uncertainty.

His natural preference is to want desirable attributes, such as knowledge, wealth, security and longevity. Man, was created and conceived in the Garden, and will strive to return to the state of the Garden with its tranquility, reliability and continuous bliss.

Self-restraint and awareness brings about balanced conduct between the pursuit of all desires and being without desires. If these two extremes are balanced, we will end up with a balanced life. We can be insolent or we can be self-effacing and shy. The balance between these two characteristics is modesty. Another virtue, steadfastness, is between over-excitement and indifference. Self-control lies between rigidity and lack of restraint. Piety is the balance between excessive asceticism and hedonism. These virtues stem from the power of attraction which, with the power of

repulsion, represents the two opposing motivational factors that dictate man's behavior patterns.

The power of attraction and the power of repulsion are traditionally labeled as representing bestial power. The power of attraction is connected with the liver and resembles the dog; its center is the heart. The power of repulsion is a savage or predatory type of power and has been symbolized by the pig. This is why they say that the spiritual master rides on his dog and his pig, because these characteristics are within all of us and are our lowest elements. We have to recognize their character if we are to ride on them to safety. The powers of repulsion, for example, ultimately lead us to the high virtues of courage, magnanimity, integrity, composure, fortitude, forbearance, self-containment and endurance.

These virtues are like the center of a circle; whose circumference contains the extremes. Courage, for example is halfway between recklessness and cowardice. Once these virtues have been acknowledged through wisdom and experience, we have the beginning of the development of the rational self. Wisdom is the highest attribute of the rational self. It is the reservoir of self-knowledge, which is based on the experience of controlling the laws of Reality, which are sub-genetically within us, and which never change. It is wisdom with its associated virtues of intelligence, rationality, clarity of thought and quickness of understanding that will lead us towards the knowledge of justice.

These moral values of goodness, generosity and wisdom have been accepted in most cultures and religions. The same values have been acknowledged throughout the history of mankind, but the definition of these values – i.e., the way in which they are expressed – differs.

Justice

Justice and goodness are inseparable, as justice implies good judgment. In everyday life we are aware of both absolute perfect justice and relative practical justice. An event on its own does not determine its goodness or badness, this judgment is time-dependent – relative or earthly judgment can vary in time and place.

The shorter the time scale that is under consideration, the more injustice is seen. During the course of a day one encounters both good and bad happenings. If one reviews the day within the framework of the week, then the month, and then the year, one will begin to better understand these events.

Man's nature is to seek the good and avoid the bad. Hence the nature of Reality must be good because man is not separate from that Reality. So if we experience a situation as being unjust or bad, it is often because of the cultural time frame in which we are looking at it. If we look at man as a creature of time, he will be seen to experience a mixture of good and bad events, the good often prevailing over the bad. The longer the time frame within which he reviews what has happened to him, the more likely he is to recognize the overall justice of events. So if man identifies with his body, he will see justice to the extent his objectivity and wisdom allow him. If he identifies with his soul, whatever phenomena take place in the physical and material realms will be understandable as part of the interplay of cause and effect. Spiritual awareness is the foundation of the recognition of divine justice at all times and situations.

It is natural that we progress from the material, physical world towards the spiritual and timeless zone. With experience and wisdom in the material world, we gain wider understanding that enables us to see the goodness that underlies the perfection of the intricate interplay and interconnection with the subtler laws. From this pinnacle of increased wisdom, we can look at the horizon of the timeless. At this dimension the question of injustice does not even arise; all is good, all is just. God is ever-perfect.

The physical and material realm is like the kindergarten in which we train and develop our exposure to perfection, so that we may reach the edge of the shore of timelessness with its infinite mercy and perfect justice. We are given a license to play in this kindergarten and practice justice in preparation for meeting the next phase of our evolvment. Human justice in this world is at best an echo of ever present divine justice.

The more man's laws are in line with absolute justice, the more lasting are those laws. When man misapplies his freedom in relation to the creational laws that bind him, chaos ensues. Upholding justice is part of the knowledge given to man, of how to apply his freedom to its full capacity within the bounds, through the recognition of those bounds.

There are many verses in the Qur'an enjoining man to justice:

Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good
(to others)...

(16:90)

O, you who believe! Be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety, and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah is Aware of what you do.

(5:8)

Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to their owners and that, when you judge between people, you judge with justice...

(4:58)

He said: As to him who is unjust, we will chastise him, then shall he be returned to his Lord, and He will chastise him with an exemplary chastisement.

(18:87)

And as to those who believe and do good deeds, He will pay them fully their rewards; and Allah does not love the unjust.

(3:57)

And Allah sets forth a parable of two men; one of them is dumb, not able to do anything, and he is a burden to his master; wherever he sends him, he brings no good; can he be held equal with him who enjoins what is just, and he (himself) is on the right path?

(16:76)

From the above verses we see that justice and the 'path' are related. Even in existential matters, we all want the smoothest of journeys. This means we want to be just to ourselves. How can we do this, if we are not just to the laws of creation?

Reward and Punishment

Everything in nature is good and benign, for God's bounty is all-encompassing and His mercy precedes His anger (wrath). This point is explained in the following verse:

On the day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long duration of time; and Allah makes you to be cautious of (retribution from) Himself; and Allah is Compassionate to the servants.

(3:30)

Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.

(6:160)

All good deeds will be magnified, while evil actions will only bring about an equal level of retribution, because everything in creation is in expansion towards perfection.

Both reward and punishment are necessary for they are the fruits or follow-up of all actions that emanate from us. They are not initiated from outside of us.

All aspects of disobedience and transgression are incongruities or breaks in a system. The system behind this existence is one of unification; hence all these experiences are non-unifying.

What! When a misfortune befell you, and you had certainly afflicted (the unbelievers) with twice as much, you begin to say: Whence is this? Say: It is from yourselves; surely Allah has power over all things.

(3:165)

Punishment is the reaction that is applicable only to the slave. It does not contra-indicate the existence of the prior mercy of God. We are judged to be obedient or disobedient after we have acted. The function of punishment is to prevent us from continuing to be disruptive. When spiritual seekers refer to punishment in the context of purification, emptying or polishing, they mean it is a way through which we can wash off the filth and incongruities of disharmony and disobedience.

There is often misunderstanding about the question of those who appear pre-destined to misery and difficulties. One tradition that is frequently misinterpreted is this one:

‘He who is miserable is miserable from his mother’s womb.’

One of the meanings of this tradition is that the physical traits of the person are determined genetically, so they have already been decided when the fetus is formed. The tradition also refers to the knowledge of all events that exist in non-time. However, the person himself, existing in time, has to strive within the limitations of his situation. God’s knowledge of the decree does not preclude man’s freedom to act, for His knowledge and man’s freedom to choose are two different zones and are not related.

So it is incumbent upon all of us, whatever our circumstances, to beseech God for His assistance.

Although genetic limitations exert considerable influence on the character, a great deal of change can occur in the person through spiritual development. Indeed some true believers can rise spiritually to such heights that their physical or other disabilities pale into insignificance against their acquired states.

Every Rule has an Exception

All phenomena that are measurable or experience-able in the sensory world are subject to the law of opposites. Their existence is dependent upon this polarity. If there was only light, we would be unable to distinguish it, and it would be taken for granted. If an awareness of death was not within us, we would not be aware of life, nor could we appreciate it.

In a subtle way within every rule we also notice an inherent opposite or an exception. An example of this is the law of gravity, which prevails in our physical world, but at the boundary of that world the power of gravity ceases. On average the life span of a human being is seventy years. However, there are those who die when over a hundred. Sometimes these exceptions are called miracles but this is only a name to describe logical phenomena, which are outside the general rule.

If there is a river and the average speed of its flow is ten miles an hour, any floating object – if there is no wind or other obstacle to impede it – will travel at ten miles an hour. At the very edge of the river, the object will not move at all. There the molecules of water are almost immobile. At the point where the edge of the water touches the river bank, there is no motion. So the rule is that the average speed of the river's flow is ten miles an hour. The exception is that there is also a molecular layer of water that is motionless, yet it is part of the water in the river.

So within the norm or the rule, there is an exception. The majority of phenomena follow a norm but there will always be a small part that exhibits abnormal behavior. This behavior is absolutely at the edge of the system. If we take it to its ultimate cutting edge, it becomes the inter-space between motion and immobility. Therefore, it no longer exhibits the norm, which applies to the mainstream. This overlap of systems occurs across the board.

Rational behavior and the foundation of logic and science are based

on the phenomenon of cause and effect, and the law of opposites and duality. We exist and develop utilizing this foundation with security, yet exceptions to it exist. Madness is the exception to sanity, as enlightenment is to ordinary consciousness; the latter is beyond the laws of causality, as it has to do with the sphere of unification. All intellectual pursuits are based on the balance between the opposites, for this is the general rule in the physical experiential world. The exception to the rule, which encompasses all that, is based on a unified spectrum.

Reality is based on the rule of time and space; exceptional reality is beyond time and space. Man functions and is familiar with the existential reality beyond which lies the exceptional reality of infinite time and space. The seeker of truth progresses along the path of rational behavior up to a point where all processes of cognizance and awareness cease; at that edge subjectively the pure experience of beingness sets in. The rule is being something or another; the exception is pure being. This is the purpose of creation.

Miracles

A miracle can be defined as a break in our comprehension of cause and effect. By necessity, knowledge is limited. If it were not limited, there would be no comprehension. There can be no knowledge unless there are limitations to what we can know. Therefore, whatever is called knowledge intrinsically has bounds. It is like a child whose knowledge is so limited that he cannot catch the sleight of hand, and he considers a magician's trick a miracle. By the same token, anything that we observe in nature, which appears to be incomprehensible or out of the 'norm', is considered by us to be miraculous.

A miracle can be seen as occurring at the interface between the seen and the unseen, the known and unknown. Everything in life has a spectrum – a gross and subtler aspect, a black and a white. Light, for example, at one extreme exhibits its characteristics very much as a wave. At the other extreme, it exhibits itself as a particle. Concerning its behavior as a particle, it reaches a certain point which is called Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. There are zones in which our knowledge can no longer rely on causality and logic. It is at these zones and beyond that we describe events as miraculous.

This is the farthest point to which we can go in the ocean of this system

of knowledge. However, there is another system that knows exactly how that randomness will behave. These two systems are interconnected, and where they overlap, events may occur which the superstitious man sees as miraculous.

In the Qur'an and in our Islamic traditions, there are many references which indicate that man is inherently driven to know. In fact, the pursuit of science and man's desire for knowledge are an intrinsic proof that there is no such thing as the supernatural. Man from time immemorial has pursued knowledge of the universe around him, by seeking the natural and avoiding or changing what is considered as unnatural. Science, thus, must have within it the key to all physical and material knowledge. What remains is the metaphysical science which connects with consciousness.

In a well-known tradition God reveals: 'I was a hidden treasure and I wished to be known. Therefore I created creation in order that I might be known.' Everything in existence can be known, for all creational reality is based on natural laws, which can be explained by causality. These laws of nature are cosmic, not chaotic. Thus from the viewpoint of all-encompassing (seen and unseen) knowledge, there are no such things as miracles; they exist only outside the bounds of our limited comprehension.

The ordinary man in his ignorance sees something out of the 'norm' as being a miracle, whereas the men of knowledge see everything as being in the 'norm'. The latter view all creation in its majestic splendor, knowing that the One Who holds it all together is not visible, yet He is in complete control. This is the ultimate magic.

The small aberrations that may intrigue us are of no concern to the men of knowledge. These men are concerned with the flow of the stream, the way it moves, the direction in which it is going, and most importantly the Source. They are not interested in the edges or exceptions which fascinate us, because we often do not see what is closest to us.

Kismet (*Qismah*) – Luck, Fortune

The root of *qismah* (or kismet as it is commonly spelled in English) is *qasama* which means *to share, to apportion, to divide, to distribute, to arrange, to assign*. *Qasim* is the *divider*, and kismet is the outcome of the division or distribution.

Kismet is generally used in the sense of luck or fortune. These meanings relate to success and the achievement of a defined objective. The effort and hope to reach an objective interacts with the environment, where

outside factors will constantly impinge, sometimes easing the situation, sometimes creating a reverse effect.

If the target, for example, is to build a house and the weather is favorable, then less resources and time will be needed. However, if the weather is bad, more resources and time may be required to protect the material and the workers. This example is easy to understand. However, in a complex world, the conflicting factors, including unknown and unforeseeable forces that will impact upon each other, may make it impossible to ensure the outcome.

We express our inadequate knowledge of the model by the terms 'good luck', 'bad luck', 'good fortune' and 'misfortune'. All these terms imply a value judgment when anything is favorable to our objective it is called good luck, when unfavorable, bad luck or misfortune.

With more knowledge we could have a clearer picture of the relevant causes and their effects. A child who discovers a sweet in his pocket considers he is lucky. The mother who has placed the sweet there finds his discovery a natural event with no need to bring luck or fortune into the situation.

Luck is when a desired outcome has been enhanced by an unexpected or special occurrence. We usually call an event a misfortune when we expected a desirable outcome, the unexpected occurred and the result disappoints us.

Thus the term 'good fortune' or 'luck' can be seen as an expression of ignorance made fortuitously when what we consider desirable or important for our contentment and satisfaction has been met under complex circumstances, which we do not fully comprehend.

Supplication and Prayer

Supplication is an example of our freedom to act. It is an expression of our objectives, desires or needs. We supplicate at a physical level to regain our health, at a mental level to have a steady mind, at a spiritual level to have a pure heart and be freed from self-inflicted burdens. In this expression lies the first step towards success. The fact that we have expressed that need, whether it is real or not, low or high, is the first step either towards fulfilling or abandoning it.

When we express a desire in prayer, our inner intention, as well as our

outer behavior, needs to be focused towards that end, so our desire is more likely to be granted. At all levels supplication is purifying because a desire or a need is a cause of continuous imbalance and supplication strives to correct that imbalance. On the physical level we move towards our goal, on the mental level we continually concentrate on how we can fulfill our needs, and on the spiritual level we hope to be guided by the unseen.

People of spiritual insight know that a just and true desire will always be fulfilled. If a child desires a permissible object and asks for it persistently, he may eventually obtain it. It is the same with supplication. Reality will ultimately provide the remedy that will bring goodness. At first supplication may be superficial but the more persistent and serious it is, and the more it stems from one's inner depths, the more one is likely to receive it.

The meaning of supplication at a human level is thus a clarification and an awareness of needs and desires. It is hoped at the unseen level that the expression of these objectives will bring about the right elements that are required for their fulfillment.

Causality and Repentance

Physical outer events can sometimes lead to a subtle reaction. If over a period of time, for example, one does not take care of the condition of the tires on a car, they will eventually wear out. One has set up a chain of events, a channel, which will finally lead to that inevitable catastrophe. However, through the connection between these systems of the gross and the subtle, the outcome of that hypothetical chain could result in the form of a dream, in which a car accident takes place. It is decreed that a certain outcome will occur as a result of one's actions but that outcome may be transferred to a subtler realm. Thus, physical actions can result in happenings that are subtle and vice versa.

We cannot speak about decree and destiny in their totality without considering all the systems that are at play in the visible and invisible, in matter and energy. Therefore, the decree, which is absolute, and in one sense unchangeable because it is based on causality, can still have an unexpected outcome although this outcome would be a mirror image in the subtle sense of the physical/material system.

The reverse of this is also true. A sudden inspiration that gives us a vision of fame and fortune in a far-off land can result in a physical reality. In the total system, there is no barrier between the gross and the subtle.

There are many teachings in Islamic traditions which reflect this.

We have, for example, the case of the Prophet Nuh, to whom we have previously referred. When he came to his people, they had already committed so much erroneous and disturbing action that it was not only affecting their lives but also changing their entire environment. Through his prophetic insight, Nuh foresaw that his people's actions had caused so much seen and invisible disturbance that the deluge would come. He implored them to repent and change their ways, in the hope that the flood could be averted or diminished. They would not change, so Nuh realized that it was too late for repentance. Destiny in the form of the floods was inevitable.

There are traditions that indicate that supplication and prayers may not always be effective. The Qur'an says:

...and do not speak to Me in respect of those who are unjust;
surely they shall be drowned.

(23:27)

This means that there are limits to every situation and there will be cases when the decree cannot be changed. If, for example, we catch a case of cancer in its early stages, we may be able, through diet, healthier living and appropriate remedies to prevent the cancer-producing cells from increasing. If this does not happen early on in the sickness, we may have to resort to surgery or chemotherapy; and eventually a time will come, when nothing will be able to arrest the progress of the disease.

Any chain of events will eventually reach a stage where intercession is ineffective. The knowledge of these stages is beyond our comprehension. This is why we say this knowledge only exists with God. However, aspects of it may be revealed to us in specific situations.

In the Qur'an and traditions there are descriptions of situations where it is necessary to completely abandon a system. This was the case with the Prophet Nuh when he realized it was too late to alter the course of destiny. He constructed his ark and sailed away on the flood to safety.

This is the meaning of repentance, of asking to be saved from the outcome of our past ignorant actions. If we have genuinely acted in ignorance, we will be saved anyway, because inherently we did not know what was happening. This is why we say: 'Our actions are as good as our intentions', or 'as good as the attention and direction we are taking'.

If we set out on the path of the discovery of Reality, through the

knowledge of its laws and their application, then we will come to know these rules according to the extent of the openness and purity of our hearts. The pure heart is the ultimate receiver of that knowledge.

The Search for Happiness

The development of the faculty of reasoning begins from childhood. This process of growth and cognizance starts from the child's assessment of his immediate environment, progressing as he grows to maturity in the mental and intellectual realms. The adult attempts to achieve harmony and equilibrium at all levels, be it the physical comfort of a balanced room temperature or intellectual or spiritual harmony.

A person with a certain measure of intelligence may realize that the particular environment he is in is not conducive to his physical health or material well-being. Hence migration may be necessary. Animals do this naturally; man reaches this conclusion through a process of reasoning, counseling and investigation.

The search for ease, comfort and equilibrium begins with the physical and ends up in most natural cases with concern for inner spiritual development. So when the person begins with a great deal of concern about his physical harmony and well-being, he often ends with the reverse situation – i.e., greater concern about his inner state. This is a natural progression because his physical activity is at its maximum at the beginning of his life. He begins with maximum physical activity, minimum inner. If the situation is not reversed as he grows older, you have the pitiful sight of an old man acting foolishly. This is often the fate of old people in societies that have not evolved spiritually.

It is an infallible law of Reality that we are propelled in every situation and at every level to seek equilibrium and well-beingness. Each tribe, society, nation or culture is ultimately seeking balance, stability and goodness within their specific environment, although each individual search will manifest differently.

The ultimate definition of betterment at the physical level – i.e. bodily comfort, material security, companionship – means to be least disturbed for the maximum time. In other words, peace and satisfaction are achieved by attaining what is conducive for the longest period of time or avoiding that which is not conducive. Happiness is inversely proportionate to demands

and expectations; the less the demands and expectations, the higher the level of contentment, equilibrium and potential of happiness.

Human beings continuously strive for outer betterment as represented by material security and possessions but tend to ignore or postpone the search for inner well-beingness. So many people today end their lives surrounded by every material luxury yet disappointed and embittered, dependent on drugs and other distractions. Man's continuous desire for peace and contentment is a trial run of preparation for the next phase of existence, which is beyond the limitation of time and space – after death. If he cannot find these states in a more natural way, he may resort to artificial inducements. When even these props fail him, he may try to take his life. People who commit suicide only confirm the unfulfilled purposelessness of their lives.

Throughout history we find mankind demanding equality. Indeed, most of our present political and economic systems, be they democratic or otherwise, uphold this ideal. However, little thought is given to the meaning of equality, justice and peace.

We may desire the material comforts that others possess. It is often not, however, the actual material possessions that we seek but the effect and outcome of their acquisition upon us. It is not the metal and rubber of the sports car that we love; it is the image and status of the proud owner that we long for, in addition to whatever utility value the article may have.

There is no end to material pleasure. Yet it would be impossible for us to collect, store and use all the material objects which we may desire from time to time. What we really desire is the access to or possibility of that state of contentment, satisfaction and freedom from want, which the acquisition of these goods brings. Our goal, therefore, is freedom and equilibrium. We are seeking the opportunity to exercise the ultimate objective of being physically, mentally and intellectually in a state of equilibrium free of agitation and anxieties.

Man forgets that material objects only make a limited contribution to his sustainable happiness. Money can remove misery caused by lack of food, shelter, clothing and other basic needs. The outer needs that give physical well-being are only necessary if they assist inner awakening, without which no amount of material acquisition suffices. Money and material objects can only reduce misery up to a point. Increase in wealth does not increase happiness. In fact greater wealth can increase anxiety and concerns. The frequently heard cries of inequality really means access

to equal opportunity and potential, without a built-in bias or favoritism not based on rationally acceptable justifications such as performance, ability, education, etc. Everyone knows that no two fingers are the same, let alone two people, yet everyone expects to have the same potential.

It is interesting to note that mankind's primal demand for equity is based on the fact that we all intrinsically have the same opportunity and personal freedom to achieve spiritual awakening to its ultimate limitation. In truth each and every one member of the human race carries the same sacred spark in their heart. We know that God is just but man's justice is only relative. Hence we expect equity because it is godly, but equality is to do with the world and man, so we know it can never be absolute.

Why People Differ

People differ in their capacity for good and evil. The inner lower tendencies differ according to their subtlety and strength. This is what is referred to as the degree of closeness or furtherance from God.

Imagine the world to be a giant cooking pot in which we are all being processed at varying speeds, according to our individual states and make-up. We will, then, discover that each one of us is given certain limitations, freedoms and possibilities for action suitable to our specific situation. A king has a country at his command, while a legless blind man can only control an area of a few feet around him. Ultimately, if they progress spiritually, they will make the same discovery. The king will find out that nothing in this world will satisfy him and that true satisfaction can only come from awakening to the soul within, as will the blind man.

While we may differ as to varying capacities on the micro level, we do not differ in our potential for reaching the same point of inner contentment and realization. Each one of us is the project of the Creator, and the objective of that project is the discovery of the infallibility of the Creator and the perfection of His laws.

So our differences only exist for us to discover our essential sameness with regard to our quest for liberation and happiness. The differences between us are superficial although, to the child or those who are less developed spiritually, the distinctions of race, color, religion, physical and intellectual types may seem enormous. The man of wisdom, however, goes to the essence; for him each star has its own spectrum of vibration but a star is essentially a star. Ultimately, each one of us exudes the same thing. We all have positive and negative elements within us. The outer

differences of language or color are diversities based upon a foundation of inner similarity. Cultural differences are merely the outer habits to which society is accustomed. The basic motive and original cause of these habits is similar in all cultures and societies.

We all come from the same Source, are sustained by the same Source, and at the end collapse back again into that Source. The question we must ask is about the extent of our submission to the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The following tradition is related from the Prophet:

‘People are like gold and silver mines. The good of them before Islam is the same as the good of them in Islam.’

Islam is only the process of purification by which the gold is extracted from the debris. It is not going to affect the metal content. This is already done, based on other factors, such as genes and environment. Islam is simply a more efficient method in that it enables man to achieve his objective and fulfill his purpose of life more quickly.

People, like mines, contain a lot of debris as well as sudden seams of pure gold. Hence it is up to us to struggle to dispose of the rubbish within us, and develop the science and technology of inner meaning –i.e. inner development and purification.

In the *Fusus al-Hikam* (Seals of Wisdom) in the chapter of ‘The Seal of the Wisdom of being lost in love in the word of Ibrahim’, Muhyi al-Din ibn‘Arabi says:

‘That which was in your fixed reality appears in your manifestations and what Truth has done has only caused a fragrance of existence upon you. So do not praise yourself, and do not condemn except yourself, for there is nothing left upon you of Truth (Reality) except praise for that existence that belongs to Him and not to us.’

Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib relates the following Prophetic tradition in *Nahj al-Balaghah*:

‘He who finds goodness let him praise Allah, and whoever sees and finds other than that let him only blame himself.’

God guides whoever is ready for guidance and is receptive to transformation. We cannot guide whom we love. If we wish somebody to be guided, he too has to desire it, behave properly, and become at one with

God's decree; for God has given the freedom to that individual to remain at a loss or to reconnect with what he is already connected to without his knowledge. God's wish is according to God's laws. His law includes the freedom of the individual, whether he wants to acknowledge it or not. The individual himself must decide he wants to see the light in this tunnel of life. We cannot impose this wish on others. God has given the capacity of discrimination to everybody and made it easy for us to see. However, the majority does not comprehend, and those of us who do are powerless to guide those whom we love. God's law has to be followed in order for that awakening to occur.

Selective Search

People, who seek spiritual guidance, sometimes take only part of the meaning of a story rather than the whole. This may be due to their limited knowledge or the dictates of expediency. Thus, they mislead themselves and others by being biased in their selectivity.

Woe, then, to those who write the book with their hands and then say: This is from Allah, so that they may take for it a small price; therefore woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn.

(2:79)

There is always the danger of the selective *nafs* (ego) choosing what it likes and disregarding what is not conducive. The Qur'an places the responsibility squarely upon the individual.

Yea! Whoever earns evil and his sins beset him on every side, these are the inmates of the fire; in it they shall abide.

(2:81)

Reality is multi-dimensional; we cannot take parts of it and neglect other aspects in order to suit our emotions. It is one totally integrated, interwoven model. Initially it is the separation from wrong intentions and actions that needs to be established. Guidance from the purified heart can then begin to be effective.

Fate or Freedom

The following Qur'anic verses are among those relevant to the question of whether man is compelled by God to wrong action or has been given

free will, which are often deliberately or inadvertently misinterpreted.

...but He causes to err whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases; and most certainly you will be questioned as to what you did.

(16:93)

Surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases, and He knows best the followers of the right way.

(28:56)

Both these verses are often quoted by those who claim that everything is in God's hands and what is in man's hand is limited and is lent to him by God's generosity. The correct interpretation is that the ultimate power is in God's hands, as everything in creation emanates from this one Source. If God through His power had caused all His creation to be awakened, there would have been no differentiation between good and bad, and no meaning of punishment or reward. All knowledge is ultimately from God and He has created in man the ability to perceive and change at will. If He had forced him to be the owner of that guidance, he would not have known the meaning of being at a loss. His program is that of participative evolution. The believer will come to realize the unifying Cause from which he arose, which sustained and developed him and to which he will return after recognition of the worldly duality. This existence has always been based on a unified all-encompassing timeless Reality.

God only selects to the extent that man elects to understand God's laws and follow them. God selects a successful farmer in the sense that the farmer chooses to observe the natural laws of growth and harvest and applies his skills in line with these natural laws. If he does this the farmer has chosen to be successful, but if he acts in ignorance he will be punished by failure because he will have neglected the laws of his Creator.

The Creator and Created

The relationship of the world to its Creator is not like that of the house to the builder, nor like that of the writer to his writing. These situations are independent of their instigator in the sense that the physical act of building or writing stops when the builder or writer completes his work, but what has previously been created – i.e., the house or the book – remains.

The relationship is similar to that between speech and the speaker. Once

the speaker ceases to speak, his speech disappears. Equally it resembles the light of the sun in the darkness of space. The existence of the sun continues because it has its own existence. In the same way, speaking is not a part of the speaker but it is his action and his doing; the light that can be seen in space is not a part of the sun but an overflow from it, so this creational world is not part of the Creator but it is a grace or an effulgence that emanates from Him.

Life on earth emanates from the sun and without it there would have been no living entities. However, the sun alone does not cast a shadow; it is 'I' who cast the shadow. It is true to say that the shadow is caused by the sun, but equally the shadow is caused by me, through my interaction with the sun. Without the sun there would be no me, hence no shadow. However, the choice of casting the shadow rests in my hands. Bad action, like the shadow, is not from the sun; it springs from my abuse or ignorance.

There is a relationship between my (limited) will and the universal divine will or the sun. The Absolute will is from the divine Creator, but I decide whether or not to cast a shadow; so the essence of all this is created by God but the specificity of it is made by me, because there is a personal will. Ultimately there is no power except God's but limited freedom of action has been delegated to me.

A Better Destiny

Man is programmed to be constantly striving for a better life for himself through the knowledge of the decree. This striving is part of man's destiny.

Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi said:

'Leaving ignorance teaches me that you can escape from one destiny to another, but this is not against destiny because striving is part of destiny.'

Here decree and destiny are equated: man's inherent tendency is to strive, develop and improve, because striving at all times is in his destiny.

When Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib had fled from under a crumbling wall, as explained earlier, he had escaped destiny by the decree. It had been decreed that he would see the wall was beginning to crumble and he was given enough time to flee before the wall collapsed. So on this occasion it was the decree of God that the Imam should be saved, and the Imam simply followed God's will.

From the Commentary of Ibn Abi'l-Hadid expounding upon *Nahj al-Balaghah* of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Khutbah No. 132, we have

an incident related concerning 'Umar ibn al-Khattab during one of his journeys to Syria. Before entering the country, 'Umar was told that it was stricken with plague. He assembled his people and asked them what he should do. They unanimously said he should not enter the country, except for Abu'Ubaydah ibn al-Jar who was the leader of the Muslim forces in Syria. He objected to 'Umar not going in to the town, saying:

'O Commander of the Faithful, are you running from the decree of Allah?'

'Umar answered:

'Yes, I run from the decree of Allah, by the decree of Allah, to the decree of Allah. I do not want to die. I want to worship the Everlasting Who is in me, for as long as I am able. I do the best I can until the Everlasting takes hold of what has been entrusted into my custody, which is my life. Whilst it is in my hands, I have to do the best by it.'

When the Prophet Muhammad was asked:

'Are we in a situation where the affair has been completed (i.e. finished with) or in an affair that is being reviewed?'

The Prophet answered:

'We are in an affair that has been completed and we are in an affair that is being reviewed and revised constantly.'

This means that while the laws that govern this existence are fixed, we have some freedom to move from one set of laws to others. Once we realize that there are certain factors in nature that cannot change, we can begin to change ourselves and be subjected to other forces that are more suitable or conducive.

'And you shall not find any change in the *Sunnah* of God.'

The fact that creation has been made for evolution cannot be changed; what can be revised and changed is the extent of our own spiritual evolvement. God's knowledge of our ultimate destiny in no way impinges on our freedom to choose, and does not absolve us from the responsibility to act.

And when We wish to destroy a town, We send Our commandment to the people of it who lead easy lives, but they transgress therein; thus the word proves true against it, so We destroy it with utter

destruction. (17:16)

Nothing in creation happens without a cause. Amongst the important causes of the destruction of a culture is excess. This brings about decadence and final collapse. So it is man who brings about his own doom through his ignorant actions. The angelic powers are simply the programmed energies that carry out that finality.

Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them rulers in the earth as He made rulers those before them, and that He will most certainly establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them, and that He will most certainly, after their fear, give them security in exchange; they shall serve Me, not associating aught with Me; and whoever is ungrateful after this, these it is who are the transgressors.

(24:55)

The religion (*din*) of God is abandonment unto God, which is the religion of Islam (*din al-Islam*).

The Free Man

This book's objective is to share with the reader the knowledge that there are situations which are determined and cannot change, yet within any determined situation there are areas which allow for some freedom of action and change.

We can only affect and influence up to a certain level and the greater the distance in time and space we are dealing with, the less likely our ability to impact on events. It can be compared to a weather forecast. We may be able to have a reasonably accurate forecast for a short term weather situation but are likely to be more inaccurate in predicting the longer term over a greater distance. The extent of our free will similarly is very limited.

The fact that we will all die eventually, and that the sun and moon move in prescribed orbits, are but examples of determined conditions, the outcomes of which we can predict with certainty. We can calculate, for example, the exact time of an eclipse. As for the areas of freedom, we have opportunities to move about and experiment with so that we may delineate the bounds; the bounds being that the more we act without any expectation, the greater the freedom of our action. We call it 'free action' when we act 'for the sake of God', or acting for 'its own sake', without

any expectations of reward. When this happens reward is more likely to come to us spontaneously and we will not suffer from the consequences of our attachments.

The so-called 'free man' or the 'man of God' is only acting in harmony with the laws of creation. Freedom implies ease of flow and inner harmony; even if the person is in a state of outer challenge or concern. What is ideal is total peace and tranquility but the inner state often dictates the outer.

The enlightened being acts diligently, forcefully and single-mindedly, yet there is nothing of his personality in his actions because there is no self. This is the road to freedom. The 'man of God' has tested the hypothesis that God's mercy is all-encompassing, in every situation and at all times. He recognizes that the boundaries are the keys to the recognition of the free will of God. Thus, he frees his own will, and the will of God prevails. The will of God is timeless. The 'man of God' is biologically subject to time, but his actions are based on values that are beyond the constrictions of time.

The title of 'free man' can be misleading as it has within it some contraindication. He can only exert his capacity to the maximum without any expectations at any given moment. He is living in the 'now', not acting on an impulse of yesterday, or the whim of tomorrow. Yesterday has made its impact on him – its imprint remains – and tomorrow's plans lie before him, but his 'now' is full. At the moment of action, his concentration is complete, for he acts as though nothing else existed, with full power and awareness and with no expectations of personal rewards. The real reward will come from his witnessing of the unfolding for others; for there is no otherness anyway, there is only the unfolding of Reality. Real freedom is when there are no choices.

The man of God is like a living pebble on the riverbed witnessing what moves above and around him. He witnesses destiny, yet his inner core is secure. He is also like a willow tree; the branches and leaves follow the wind of destiny, while the roots are firmly in the ground. His inner certainty is unshakable whereas his outer circumstances are in constant change, his inner forever secure and his outer in a state of flux. He acts in this world in a completely dedicated, yet connected way. If his connection is total, so also will be his disconnection. He is in this world but does not belong to it. It is not that he is separate from the world; rather, he lives in total harmony with each moment with the freedom and clarity that can

only be brought about by the state of complete surrender that is true Islam.

He may be subjected to afflictions but these are superficial and only leave traces upon him. Many of the Prophets experienced such afflictions. They could have left their people or forced them to behave differently but they were men who were there to unveil for their people the truth of existence. They were there to shed light from their purer mirrors into dustier mirrors, for people to be able to clean their own mirrors, and act as agents for their inner development and awakening.

Men of knowledge flow with ease along their eventual destiny in this life. This was the case with Imam Husayn, even though he was brutally martyred. The constraints were such that a man of his spiritual status and connection with truth could not pay allegiance to a drunken despot like Yazid. The state of the 'free man' is that he is not subject to inner or outer blame, because he is completely integrated with the situation around him. Hence he is free in the sense that he will not look back and regret any of his actions. We, on the other hand, may look back at events and wish we had not acted erroneously. At the time we may not have been sufficiently aware of all the factors to make the correct decision, nor were we fully connected and in submission to Reality's laws.

As explained earlier that as far as the decree is concerned, these are generally three viewpoints. One alleges that the affair is in man's hands. The second alleges that God forces His slaves as He wills. The third viewpoint holds that God has demanded from His slaves what they can do, and does not burden them with what they cannot. This is the viewpoint of the man who praises God and, in error, asks forgiveness. This is the true Muslim.

This view falls between the two extremes of those, who on the one hand, say: 'everything is from God, including all of my wrong actions', to the other extreme, 'God has delegated His Power to us so whatever we do is right.' It is both and neither. If a person says that man is completely free, he is speaking the truth from the angle that man has been given freedom of action. Yet when somebody else says that man is completely constricted, there is truth in that too; for man's inherent tendency is to seek goodness and avoid that which he considers undesirable. Man has limited freedom in the world of constriction and set patterns. He is forced with some choice.

Imam al-Ghazzali described man as being 'in a station between the

two stations'. The Imam means by this that man is free in so far as his actions are concerned because his actions are not confirmed, while those of nature are completely programmed. He is forced in as far as his actions are not completely under his direct control. Factors outside his conscious awareness affect his behavior in ways he can never fully comprehend. Thus he is able to perform freely in certain circumstances, yet remains a creature subject to the overall control of His Creator.

We are bound with some freedom. The bounds become clearer as we follow them, and our subtlety increases. Initially there appears to be no bounds, but the more our awareness develops the clearer the limits become. The time will arrive when we do not move unless our movement is in harmony with our situation and higher consciousness.

The spiritual seeker who wishes to achieve this state of inner freedom has to go through the practices of continuous and spontaneous remembrance with regular stock-taking of actions and intentions. He should pray to God in gratitude for his good actions so that God may increase him in goodness and save him from arrogance. When he has done wrong he seeks forgiveness and hopes to be in constant remembrance. He always refers to the light of higher consciousness transmitted from his soul. His enslavement to this light will free him from distractions from the perfect path of beingness.

Conclusion

Almost all human beings accept the fact that we have a certain measure of freedom in action and thoughts at a microcosmic level. In the greater scheme of things, however, there is a biological, as well as spiritual, evolutionary path that represents the arc of descent to earth and ascent back to the original light.

In the Qur'an and the Prophetic teachings there are numerous references demonstrating that we have a certain measure of freedom. In many cases this freedom is superseded by forces beyond us. Verse 154 from Surat Al-i-'Imran illustrates this situation comprehensively:

'Then after sorrow He sent down security upon you, a calm coming upon a party upon you, and (there was) another party whom their own souls rendered anxious; they entertained about Allah thoughts of ignorance quite unjustly, saying: We have no hand in the affair. Say: Surely the affair is wholly (in the hands) of Allah. They conceal within their souls what they would not reveal to you. They say: Had we any hand in the affair, we would not have been slain here. Say: Had you remained in your houses, those for whom slaughter was ordained would have certainly gone forth to the places where they would be slain, and that Allah might test what was in your breasts and that he might purge what was in your hearts; and Allah knows what is in the breasts'.

(3:154)

During the battle of Uhud many of the Muslims weakened and had doubts about their tragic position against a superior enemy. The key message of this verse is that the entire outcome is in Allah's hand but the individual meets a destiny according to his or her intention and attention. This illustrates how the microcosmic free will is only a small portion of the macrocosmic greater patterns, most of which are invisible to us.

If there is genuine abandonment, submission and surrender to Supreme Consciousness or God, this will bring about a state of great awareness, connection and purity, which is close to pure consciousness. The self, then, becomes like a pure mirror reflecting the soul and its primal original light of truth without the confusion of duality. This state is man's destiny. A

clear mind, pure heart and the inner sacred light of God act as guidance for the earthly journey.

We are intended to taste, desire and move towards achieving this state and remain in its station. This is the worthy destiny for a noble creature. So from this perspective there is but one destiny for all; hence backdrops and personal biographies are of little relevance. They are insignificant events compared with the final triumph of returning to the Source from which we came; for then we will know the Truth by the light of that Truth itself.

Man comes from the unified state of unseen Oneness into the creational duality of this life on earth, and he returns back via a new consciousness to witness again the infinite Reality from which he springs. This is what is decreed. Whenever this is achieved consciously or by death, man will have fulfilled his perfect destiny. Thus decree is interactional and participative.

Therefore the state of the final destiny will be subject to the choice of the individual as he interacts with the original creational intention – to know the Cause behind all, the Creator, to unify and consciously remove the veil of ego and separateness. Thus he will arrive where he already was, with the One, God, the Exalted. Adam had descended from paradise so all the sons of Adam are driven consciously and by effort and will back to that eternal perfect state – the abode of the perfect soul, or the sacred spark which radiates life and light.

Glossary

The following is an expanded glossary of the key Arabic terms used by the author, arranged according to the English alphabet. Transliteration used throughout this book is based on the American Library of Congress system.

Allah – God; literally ‘the God’; the name that designates the Source from which all things seen and unseen emanate. The name Allah encompasses all the divine names, such as, *al-Rahman*, the Beneficent, and *al-‘Alim*, the Knower (of all things).

‘aql – Faculty of reason, intelligence, discernment, rationality, mind, intellect. From the verb *‘aqala*: to keep back (a camel by tying its foreleg), to detain, confine, to be restricted, be reasonable, understand, have intelligence, realize. This implies that true reason and intelligence can only be realized by keeping back the lower self (see *nafs*). The plural is *‘uqul*.

ayah, ayat – Qur’anic verse; sign or mark.

din – Usually translated to mean religion, the word strongly implies transaction between the Bestower (Allah) and the indebted (man), because the verbal root is *dana*: to owe, be indebted to, take a loan, to be inferior. Hence, living the *din* means repaying one’s debt to the Creator, or indeed, behaving as befits the high station of man in creation.

hadith – Tradition, saying (usually of the Prophet but sometimes related by the Holy Imams, relating his deeds and utterances); speech, account, narrative. From the verb *hadatha*: to happen, be new; and from *haddatha*: to relate, report, speak about.

haqiqah – Truth, fact, reality; the true nature of creation. From the verb *haqqa*: to be true, right, just.

iman – Faith, trust, belief. From the verb *amana*: to believe (in). Other words from the same root are *amina*, to be secure, to trust; *amn*, peace, security, protection; *amin* (designation of the Prophet), trustworthy, faithful, loyal, honest; *mu‘min*, believing, faithful.

jabarut – Omnipotence, power, might, tyranny. The word is derived from *jabara*: to restore, force, compel, set (broken bones), bring back to normal. Sufis use the term to describe the world of divine names and

attributes – the middle world between the physical world and the world of the unseen, which is called *malakut*.

kafir, kuffar – Denier (of the existence of Allah), one who covers up (the truth), ingrate. From the verb *kafara*: to cover, hide, be ungrateful, not to believe.

kufir – Denial, unbelief, ingratitude (see *kafir*).

lata'if – Subtleties, witticism, joke, quip, jest. From *latafa*: to be kind and friendly.

malakut – Realm, kingdom, empire, sovereignty, kingship, royalty. The word is derived from *malaka*: to take in possession, to take over, to rule. Sufis use the term to describe the world of the unseen, from which emanates the world of the souls and spirits, which through enforced decrees and laws, are manifested into the kingdom.

mu'min – Believing, faithful; believer (see *iman*).

nafs – Self, soul, mind, human being. The *nafs* includes man's innate nature, his genetic predisposition, and his conditioned behaviour. Its manifestation may be base and animalistic, or spiritually elevated, according to the state of its purity. From the verb *nafusa*: to be precious, valuable. It is also related to *naffasa*: to cheer up, reassure, relieve; and *tanaffasa*: to breathe, inhale, pause for a rest.

rizq – Livelihood, means of living, subsistence, daily bread, boon, blessing (of God), property, possession, wealth, income, pay, wages, emergency rations. From *razaqa*: to provide with the means of sustenance, to bestow (from God). God the Provider of all is called *al-Razzaq*, the Maintaining Provider.

ruh – Spirit, soul. From the verb *raha*: to go away, leave, begin, set out. Derived from this root are *rawwaha*: to refresh, relax, rest; *arwaha*: to release, relieve, soothe; *istarwaha*: to breathe, smell, be refreshed, be calm, happy, glad; *rih*: wind; *Ruhu-llah*: spirit of Allah, a title given to particularly pious and ascetic people, such as the Prophet Jesus.

shari'ah – Revealed Islamic law or code of conduct, outward path. From the verb *shara'a*: to begin, enter unbind, introduce, prescribe, give (laws). *Shar'* means road or spring. It is the complement and container of *haqiqah*, for the waters that gush from Reality's spring cannot be contained or drunk from except by a proper vessel.

shirk – Associating other-than-Allah with Allah, idolatry, polytheism. From the verb *sharika*: to be a companion, to share, participate, associate. A *mushrik* perpetuates this association.

sunnah – Way, habitual custom, line of conduct; used in reference to Allah or the Prophet. From the verb *sanna*: to shape, form, prescribe, enact, establish.

surah – Chapter of the Qur'an, sign, degree or rank. From the verb, *sara*: to mount a wall; or from *sawwara*: to enclose, fence in.

tawhid – Divine unity, union; belief in Allah's oneness. From the verb *wahada*: to be alone, unique, singular, unmatched, without equal. Derivations include *wahhada*: to unite, unify, connect, join, profess belief in the oneness of God; *wahdah*: oneness, singleness, seclusion, self-containment; *al-Wahid*: the One; *al-Ahad*: the Singular without number (attribute of Allah).

ummah – Nation, people; generation, Muhammad's community, the Muslims. From the verb *amma*: to go, betake oneself, lead the way, lead by one's example; to lead in prayer. It refers to a society that believes and lives the Islamic values in their totality and treats this life as a training ground for the hereafter. This society would adhere fully to the tenets of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

zakah – Purity; justness, integrity, honesty; justification, vindication; giving alms, charity; alms tax (obligatory under Islamic law.)

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SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI was born in Karbala, Iraq, a descendant of several generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders. He was educated in Europe and America. Shaykh Fadhlalla founded a number of companies in the Middle East and worked as a consultant in the oil industry before travelling extensively on a spiritual quest, which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth.

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